A Cinema of White Masculine Crisis: Race and Gender in Contemporary British Film

by

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I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature ……

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this thesis is contemporary British cinema. Specifically, the emergence of a representational trend within its texts that has resulted in a disproportionate number of films whose protagonists are white, male, and who are in some way, beset by crisis. Two categories of identity are thus explored in this thesis, each of which possesses its own register of meaning, each of which requires (or seems to require) a particular approach in terms of the way that it is represented in film. These two categories are race and gender. In every sense then, this thesis seeks to take part in the dialogue which since the late eighties and particularly during the 1990's, has formed around the idea that contemporary white masculinity is in crisis, and has sought to provide evidence both for and against that idea in the texts of contemporary popular culture. What this thesis aims to add to that dialogue, however, is a greater awareness of the way in which race functions in society and in cultural representations, as well as a better understanding of the extent to which its influence is discernible in the texts of contemporary British cinema *alongside* the trend towards portrayals of white masculine crisis.

Employing a cultural studies trajectory throughout, this thesis draws on areas of whiteness and race theory, masculinity studies, film theory, culture and media studies, plus theories of representation, in presenting its arguments, and uses the tools of close textual analysis during the film readings that are its single largest element. Special emphasis is placed on situating both the arguments put forward and the films discussed in their appropriate cultural context, and the thesis frequently looks for parallels outside cinema as a means of illustrating key ideas. Ultimately, this thesis aims to increase the balance of the discussion on the subject of white masculine crisis by highlighting the first term in the phrase, and to better the understanding of contemporary British cinema in the process.

PREFACE

The texts cited in this thesis have various sources. In the main, the academic texts were either acquired on loan from the University of Sussex library or were purchased from mainstream sellers. Various others were obtained from the British Film Institute library in London. In addition, a limited number of electronic articles were obtained online, and the text of various websites is quoted in the text; in both cases, the source URL is included at the point of reference, along with the date upon which the host site was originally accessed. Lastly, the film texts cited, due to their popular nature, are available generally.

INTRODUCTION

In 1989, the British film industry, once one of the world's most productive, seemed almost a thing of the past. Figures show that just thirty films were produced that year, a mere twenty four in 1981: the lowest number on record since 1914.[1] To put those numbers into some kind of perspective, the British film industry was apparently in a worse state during the 1980's than it been had throughout all the years of war and upheaval (both social and financial) which characterised the history of the twentieth century. By 1996, however, the number of films produced had increased to one hundred and twenty eight: still some way short of the golden years of the 1930's and 1950's (then the number was closer to 200), yet a significant enough improvement to hear talk of a renaissance in British cinema. Production was up, audience numbers were up, and most remarkably, so were the profits.

The turning point for this incredible reversal of fortunes can be dated almost to the day, for it is my belief that the release of *Four Weddings and a Funeral* in 1994 marked a real change in the way that British cinema was viewed both here and around the world.[2] Here was a film that not only proved immensely popular and that had international appeal (for a time it was the highest grossing British film ever), but that also seemed to say something essentially *true* about what it meant to be British – and more pointedly, British, white and male – in the twentieth century's final decade.[3] The essence of that 'something' was that this identity brought with it social awkwardness, an inability to communicate one's feelings, anxieties about sexual performance, a reluctance to commit to a loving and stable relationship, a range of general identity issues too numerous to mention, plus a whole heap of misery, pain and suffering. In short, the film suggested that the British white male was in crisis.

Since that time, the fortunes of British cinema have wavered, but one ingredient that has remained consistent (disarmingly consistent, in fact) is the portrayal of white

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[1] The International Movie Database (IMDB), used by the film industry itself, enables users to search by country and by year. This information was obtained using this method.
URL:>http://www.imdb.com/Sections/Countries/UK/by-release-date< accessed 11/12/2005.
[2] *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. (Mike Newell, Channel Four Films/Polygram Filmed Entertainment/Working Title Films, UK, 1994).
[3] The IMDB database also contains details of box-office figures, budgets and so on. See: budget pages, URL:>http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0109831/business< accessed 10/04/2007.

men whose lives are in some way beset by crisis. In the ten or twelve years after the release of *Four Weddings* (and I should perhaps state explicitly here that with the phrase 'contemporary British cinema' I am referring specifically to the years 1994-2006), a long list of British films with this precise focus emerged, leading to the unusual situation wherein many of the texts of contemporary British cinema, if not the majority, possess themes and characters that are largely similar. What is more, you need not simply take my word for it; watch almost any British film from the period in question and there is a very strong likelihood that such themes and events will be present. It is interesting, therefore, that although this trend has been acknowledged by one or two people in academia, it has yet to have been written about in any real detail, and that without exception, those who have commented upon it have failed to acknowledge its racial element, opting instead to interpret the trend as evidence for a contemporary crisis of masculinity (i.e.: racially non-specific masculinity). Andrew Spicer, for instance, in his book *Typical Men: The Representation of Masculinity in Popular British Cinema* (2003), comments in his chapter on 'Contemporary Types' that: "[a] detailed account of masculine crisis in recent British cinema would … require a separate book."[4] Claire Monk also, the author of a number of texts focusing on the representation of masculinity in contemporary British cinema, has stated: "[t]o an almost unprecedented extent, 1990's British cinema seemed preoccupied with men and masculinity in crisis."[5] Given that, in the body of film texts to which Spicer and Monk are referring, the male in question is almost exclusively a white male, it seems strange that these men should be taken as representative of British men in general. After all, there is no real reason why these films should not be described as 'White cinema' (besides, perhaps, the fact that this is also mainstream cinema, which tends to negate the need for further labels) in the same way that we might describe the films of, for instance, Spike Lee, as 'Black cinema.'

Whilst such comments as Monk's and Spicer's do at least help to confirm the existence of contemporary British cinema's peculiar fascination with masculine crisis, they also demonstrate the need for a greater balance in the discussion of white masculine crisis, for as this thesis attempts to highlight, there are two terms of identity involved here (white, masculine), not just the one. It is not my intention, therefore, that

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[4] Andrew Spicer, *Typical Men: The Representation of Masculinity in Popular British Cinema* (London, New York: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2001): 184.
[5] Claire Monk, "Men in the 90's," in *British Cinema of the 90's*, ed. Robert Murphy (London: British Film Institute Publishing, 2000): 156.

this thesis should comprise some sort of definitive guide to masculine crisis in contemporary British cinema (although such a text does deserve to be written), but rather that it should bring to light some of the different ways in which the whiteness of these representations affects both them and the real life masculine crisis for which they have been taken as evidence.

With such a focus, there are two separate, yet related areas of critical theory entailed, both of which came into being during more or less the same time frame as the aforementioned renaissance in British cinema. Rather than provide the sort of lengthy introduction that in both cases can just as easily be found elsewhere, however, what I would like to do is to sketch a brief overview of each here, and to continue that explanation in the more original, and therefore worthwhile context of the chapters themselves. As the earlier of the two to emerge, it makes sense to begin with the study of masculinity.

The focus of a massive upsurge of interest during the late 1980's and into the 1990's, the study of men and masculinity swept like wildfire through University campuses, especially in the United states, to the extent that today, the number of books on library shelves about masculinity, while still far fewer than those about femininity, might easily reach into the hundreds. Nevertheless, a general consensus exists among the resulting body of theory, this being that with the impact of feminism and liberation politics, the changes to the enforcing structures of the family and the State, and most importantly, the change from a production to a service led economy, masculinity has been left in a state of crisis. The 'average' male, it is claimed, feels confused and disenfranchised in this changed environment, having suddenly discovered that their masculine qualities, of such benefit to them previously, are either no longer beneficial, or else, are now considered entirely unacceptable.[6] Common among such explanations of masculine crisis, the like of which are found in the texts of popular culture also, is their failure to acknowledge the role of race in shaping the cultural representations that are their primary source of evidence. All too often, the white male's whiteness goes unmentioned, perhaps as a result of the same assumption that early white women feminists have since been accused of making; namely: that the white heterosexual woman was the ideal subject of enquiry for feminism since her identity excluded from prejudice other than on the grounds of gender. It was the objections to this assumption

[6] Paraphrase. Bruce Traister, "Academic Viagra: The Rise of Ameican Masculinity Studies," *American Quarterly* 52, no. 5 (2000): 280.

by non-white feminists in the United Sates such as bell hooks which led to a more 'racially' attuned feminism, and ultimately, to the development of the second area of critical theory that this thesis engages with: whiteness studies, or whiteness theory.[7]

Developing largely in the United States – with one notable exception being the work of Richard Dyer – whiteness scholarship is itself divided into a number of separate branches, the different aims of which, broadly speaking, fall into two categories.[8] The first explores the experiential side of whiteness: what it means in subjective, social, economic and political terms to 'live' whiteness.[9] The second argues for the total abolition of whiteness, and even that whiteness is a pure discursive construct, with no basis in corporeality. Straight away then, the field as a whole, segmented as it is into different schools of thought, presents the notion that there are many different kinds of whiteness, which in itself is a massive leap forward from the way that whiteness had been thought of previously, as a kind of monolithic truth or state of being that was experienced by each of its supposed 'bearers' in the same way. My interest extends to the entire scope of whiteness theory, although the focus of my research on contemporary British cinema has meant that certain texts, particularly those that are highly specific to the American case, have needed to be interpreted creatively. What this means for this thesis is that the whiteness that is discussed and analysed within these pages is by no means the same throughout. Through its different chapters, it is my intention regarding this thesis that the reader be taken on a journey *through* whiteness, through its different incarnations, meanings, and ultimately, through the different ways in which each variation or understanding of whiteness affects representation. Whiteness studies, in other words, functions as the framework upon which each of the film analyses is based, and it is this 'journey through whiteness' that runs like a thread through this thesis, and hopefully, binds the otherwise quite diverse chapters together into a coherent whole. To paraphrase Dyer, therefore, it is my hope that this approach will go some way to making the whiteness in white masculine crisis strange, for as long as race continues to play a fundamental role in organising relations of human difference (which it undeniably does), it is a mistake to ever think that it is simply not worth mentioning.[10]

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[7] See: bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (London: Turnaround, 1992).
[8] See: Richard Dyer, "White," *Screen* 29, no. 4 (1988). Richard Dyer, *White* (London: New York, 1997).
[9] See: Robyn Wiegman, "Whiteness Studies and the Paradox of Particularity," *Boundary 2: An International Journal of Literature and Culture* 26, no. 3 (1999).
[10] Dyer, 1997, ibid.: 1.

As stated, the main aim of this thesis is to demonstrate the impact of race on the contemporary British cinema of white masculine crisis, thus several key texts from the two areas of theory just outlined have influenced the arguments in the chapters that follow. Chief among these is Richard Dyer's *White*, since it was the first text to open my eyes to how whiteness functions in life and in representation; after countless re-readings it remains fascinating and I have quoted from the text liberally in the chapters that follow. Gwendolyn Audrey Foster's book *Performing Whiteness: Postmodern Re/Constructions in the Cinema* is another text that has greatly influenced this thesis, particularly chapter one.[11] Fred Pfeil's book *White Guys: Studies in Postmodern Domination and Difference*[12] skirts the areas of both masculinity studies and whiteness studies; it and Sally Robinson's *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* provide rare examples of the breed and have demonstrated the way to approach analysing representations of specifically white masculinity.[13] Paul Gormley's *The New-Brutality Film: Race and Affect in Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* has also helped to shape this thesis with its perceptive readings of race and film.[14]

Before proceeding with the thesis proper, all that remains is to provide a very brief overview of what is to come, chapter by chapter. Chapter one sets out the issues involved in analysing whiteness, and demonstrates the extent to which its influence is discernible in moving image representation. In many ways, therefore, it has more claim to the title of introduction than this section, insofar as it maps out the theoretical terrain through which each of the subsequent chapters negotiates its own individual path. Expository in nature, it discusses the books of Foster and Dyer mentioned above, and explores Foster's concepts of 'whiteface' and 'whitespace.' The bulk of the chapter is comprised of a close textual analysis of the films of the scriptwriter Richard Curtis. In terms of the journey through whiteness, the whiteness dealt with in this chapter is, as will become clear in the reading, very much of the privileged, middle class, and therefore, unmarked variety.

Chapter two focuses on a sub-category of contemporary British cinema – the post-industrial film – and looks at the way in which masculine crisis has in the case of

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[11] Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, *Performing Whiteness: Postmodern Re/Constructions in the Cinema* (Albany, NY: State U of New York P, 2003).
[12] Fred Pfeil, *White Guys: Studies in Postmodern Domination and Difference* (London/New York: Verso, 1995).
[13] Sally Robinson, *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (New York: Columba University Press, 2000).
[14] Paul Gormley, *The New-Brutality Film: Race and Affect in Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* (Bristol, Portland: Intellect Books, 2005).

the white male worker played out as a fear of extinction. It considers the impact of British political history and examines the way in which the terms 'white' and 'worker' are intimately connected. Here then, it is working class whiteness that is under discussion, a whiteness further removed, yet by no means completely separated from the implications of white racial privilege. The chapter both begins and ends with a close textual analysis of two of the three post-industrial films: *Brassed Off* (1996) and *The Full Monty* (1997).[15]

Chapter Three comprises an extended close textual analysis of Guy Ritchie's *Snatch* (2000); specifically, its representation of Irish travellers. The chapter explores the way in which this group represents whiteness at the margins, and argues for an interpretation of the film text which sees them as being marked with discursive blackness. Thus a further side to whiteness is explored, a whiteness that is by definition both questionable and subject to change, a whiteness even further removed from that found in chapter one.

Chapter Four represents the final stage in our journey through whiteness, since it examines the way in which British white youth aspires to blackness and has sought to attain blackness by various means. Exploring the apparently modern phenomenon of 'chavs' and 'wiggers,' it discovers a history of white male fascination with the idea of black masculinity. Here, whiteness has arrived at a stage where it is less an indicator of privilege than of blankness, a quality that is decidedly undesirable in comparison with its more attractive alternatives. The chapter's largest element comprises a close textual analysis of the films *About a Boy* (2002), *Ali G In Da House* (2002), *Human Traffic* (1999), and *Shopping* (1994).

As a final note in this introduction, I would like to take the rather unusual step of mentioning a criticism that was put forward by one of the readers of an earlier draft of this thesis; namely: that the choice of films seems somewhat random, and that certain key films of contemporary British cinema are not discussed. I do not mention this out of any desire to be facetious, but rather, as a means of stressing a point made earlier, which is that this thesis does not pretend to be the definitive work on contemporary British cinema, or even masculine crisis in the same. What it does aim to achieve,

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[15]*Brassed Off* (Mark Herman, FilmFour/Miramax/Prominent Pictures, UK, 1996). *Billy Elliot* (Stephen Daldry, Arts Council of England/BBC Films/Studio Canal/Tiger Aspect Productions.WT2 Productions, Working Title Films, UK/France, 2000).

however, as its title suggests, is to chart the cinema of white masculine crisis; the difference is subtle, yet significant.

Chapter One — True Identity: The "Whiteface" of Masculine Crisis in Contemporary British Cinema

> "It is ironic and fascinating that, in the face of biological evidence that race doesn't really exist, more than a century of filmic performances of whiteness would appear to insist on the existence and visual supremacy of whiteness."
> — Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, *Performing Whiteness*.[16]

> "The photographic media and, *a fortiori*, movie lighting assume, privilege and construct whiteness."
> — Richard Dyer, *White*.[17]

> "Exam Question: Some people are born white; others achieve whiteness; and some have whiteness thrust upon them. Discuss"
> — Phil Cohen, 'Labouring Under Whiteness.'[18]

In this, the first chapter of this thesis, I will be paving the way for those to follow, meaning that I will be focusing on the ways in which white masculine crisis has been framed in contemporary British cinema against a backdrop of whiteness and white representation that is at all times highly conscious, and, if one will only learn to recognise the signs, highly visible. These signs, along with the wealth of organising structures that work to keep them in play – linguistic, sartorial, technological, and ideological – represent this chapter's focus, and it is in relation to the most wholeheartedly *popular* strain of recent British cinema that they are to be explored. As with the subsequent chapters, the various issues concerned are divided into separate sections, and we begin on a note which, whilst not directly related to the subject of contemporary British film, nevertheless serves to provide a useful introduction to the key themes of this chapter.

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[16] Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, *Performing Whiteness: Postmodern Re/Constructions in the Cinema* (Albany, NY: State U of New York P, 2003): 1.
[17] Richard Dyer, *White* (London: New York, 1997): 89.
[18] Phil Cohen, "Labouring under Whiteness," in *Displacing Whiteness*, ed. Ruth Frankenberg (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 1999): 244.

1.1) Putting on a White Face: Racial Transformations and the Truth about White Performance

At the time of writing, Lenny Henry, once one of Britain's biggest, and some would say funniest comics, is back on British television screens after an absence of some years, as the presenter of *Lenny's Britain*: a series that looks at the peculiar phenomenon that is the British sense of humour.[19] The title is apt, since there has always been something markedly *British* about Henry himself: a result, perhaps, of his discernible (and often exaggerated) regional accent; his frequent reminisces about his upbringing in Burnley, Middlesex; or simply his remarkable talent for crafting comedy out of social observation. More than anything however, Henry's career has stood as an all-too-rare example of a black man 'making it' in a white man's world, and it is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that his brief foray into the medium of cinema was framed around precisely that dilemma.

True Identity, released in 1991, was not a British film in any literal sense (it was in fact produced by, and set in the U.S, and Henry even eschewed his trademark accent for an altogether less real-to-life – and less convincing – 'Yankee' affair), but one can be certain that it would not have gone unnoticed in Britain, for precisely those reasons of his 'British-ness' mentioned above.[20] Cast as Miles, an African American actor whose race has caused him to be typecast in various racially-contingent roles, Henry effectively falls foul of a similar typecasting in the film, inasmuch as he, as a black man, is represented in such a way that his race is positioned as the most important (if not the *only*) aspect to his identity. Moreover, this is not the only way in which identity, and particularly *racial identity*, is important to the film's dynamic, since after a short preamble, Miles discovers the *true identity* of a mob boss who has been living under an *assumed identity* in order to escape prosecution. Finding his life to be in danger, Miles goes to his friend Dwayne (a movie make-up artist), who promises to help him "disappear." What follows is a lengthy montage of shots depicting Miles' gradual transformation – via make-up, wigs, and prostheses – into a *white* man, and the remainder of the film derives both its dramatic and comedic effect from his experiences

[19] *Lenny's Britain*, (note to self and RM: appropriate citation required).
[20] *True Identity* (Charles Lane, Sandovar Productions/Silver Screen Partners IV/Touchstone Pictures, US, 1991).

as he struggles to maintain his new identity: or as Miles himself puts it, his experiences whilst "passing as white."[21]

True Identity was a commercial disaster, and Henry's name has long since been relegated to the footnotes of Hollywood history, but I was reminded of his performance recently whilst reading Gayle Wald's book on racial 'passing,' *Crossing the Line: Racial Passing in 20th Century Literature and Culture* (2000).[22] Comprising an in-depth review of the complex of strategies involved in racial 'passing,' Wald's text discusses both non-whites passing as whites, and vice versa, in a bid to prove that identities are, as she states: "pliable and multiply articulated 'fiction[s] of law and custom.'"[23] Perhaps more importantly, however, its introduction opens on a detailed analysis of an Eddie Murphy sketch entitled 'White Like me' (originally broadcast in 1984 as part of the popular U.S. television show *Saturday Night Live*), in which Murphy undergoes a similar transformation to Henry's in order to assume the role of "Mr.

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[21] The use of the word 'disappear' as a reference to white experiential reality here is significant. As I explained in the introduction, much of the work on whiteness that has issued from the project of making good the lack of investigation into white ethnicity has concentrated on the idea that whiteness is an *unmarked* category of identity: i.e. that the power of whiteness lies in its ability to represent the normative, whereas all other racial identities are *marked* as precisely that—Other. Thomas Nakayama and Judith Martin, for instance, have even referred to whiteness as occupying an "invisible position." More recently, however, many white theorists are reviewing this stance in their work. Ruth Frankenberg, in particular, has asserted the need to do so explicitly; she states: "[t]he more one scrutinizes it, however, the more the notion of whiteness as unmarked norm is revealed to be a mirage or indeed, to put it even more strongly, a white delusion … [rather] whiteness is in a continual state of being dressed and undressed, of marking and cloaking."
What is more, this idea of a black man being made to 'disappear' through his transformation into a white man is complicated even further by the fact that the civil rights movement has historically been fought along the lines of visibility: though in this sense the word referred to the *invisibility* of non-whites' political disenfranchisement or lack of political representation and also to their lack of representation in the more general sense, as in cultural recognition or inclusion. Rather than seeing whites as invisible, this argument held that whites were all *too* visible, and that is was those designated as Other who had to suffer invisibility. Perhaps the quintessential example of this argument's manifestation in cultural terms is Ralph Ellison's classic novel *Invisible Man* (a dialogue on black experiences in 1950s America), which opened with the words: "I am an invisible man … I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me." See:Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (London: Penguin Books, 1952): 1. Ruth Frankenberg, "The Mirage of an Unmarked Whiteness," in *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness*, ed. Eric Klineberg Brigit Brander Rasmssen, Irene J. Nixon, Matt Wray (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2001): 73-4. Thomas K. Nakayama, Martin, Judith N., ed., *Whiteness: The Communication of Social Identity* (London: Sage, 1999): 90.

[22] Gayle Wald, *Crossing the Line: Racial Passing in 20th Century Literature and Culture* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2000). 'Passing,' a term perhaps more commonly associated with the behaviors of homosexuals who disguise their sexuality in order to live without prejudice in a heterosexually-centric world, has come to be used by racial theorists in referring to identity formations that transgress the racial divide: i.e. non-whites 'passing' as whites, and whites 'passing' as non-whites. The concept of racial passing is discussed in much greater detail in chapter 4, under the heading of 'cross-racial mimesis.'

[23] Wald, 2000, ibid.: 24 (quoting: Mark Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, 1894; reprint, London, New York: Penguin, 1987: 224).

White."[24] Beginning with sequences that depict Murphy going through the same lengthy processes as just described, the sketch follows him as he gradually 'takes on' whiteness, and subsequently heads out into New York City, aiming to "actually experience America as a white man." Over the course of a single day, Murphy (as Mr. White) garners evidence of a "secret world" of whiteness: he encounters one demonstration of white racial privilege, or whites' distaste for blacks after another, perhaps the most extreme example of which is a scene that shows him going into a bank for a loan, and coming out having been given a considerable sum of free cash.[25] Having regained his blackness at the end of his 'white adventures' (much as Miles does by the close of the film), Murphy is able to speak with authority on America's "'race' problem," and suggests a solution.[26] Going back to the scene of his white transformation, we see a whole row of black men and women undergoing the same process, and Murphy delivers the killer line: the U.S. may be a Nation steeped in racial inequalities, he suggests, "[b]ut I've got a lot of friends, and we've got a lot of make-up."[27]

These two texts, produced some seven years apart, in the U.S. context, and both well in advance of the period relevant to this thesis, would not seem to tell us a great deal about the representation of white masculine crisis in contemporary British cinema. However, as both Henry's and Murphy's performances show, first appearances can often be deceptive. For instance, both texts are remarkably 'knowing' when it comes to the racial privilege that underscores the white male's experience of masculine crisis; *even if* they also gently mock the fact that that privilege is manifested in rather subtler ways than some non-white people would seem to assume. A good example of this is the afore-mentioned bank scene in 'White Like Me,' or the hotel scene in *True Identity*, in which Dwayne remarks of Miles' luxurious, but fraudulently acquired hotel suite: "[s]o this is how you white people live huh? [n]ot bad!" As Wald observes, non-whites "expectations of white entitlement and racial fraternizing" may be at times unrealistic, but the very recognition of this fact in representation "speaks to the realities that inform such expectations."[28] Needless to say, she is speaking of the Murphy sketch here, but

[24] Interestingly, Miles also refers to himself as "Harry White" at one point in *True Identity*, and one wonders if Murphy's sketch may have influenced the film-makers, or perhaps even Henry himself.
[25] Wald, 2000, ibid.: 2.
[26] Wald, 2000, ibid.: 2.
[27] I have been unable to obtain a copy of the sketch to date, so this description relies entirely on paraphrasing Wald's own. See: Wald, 2000: 2-4.
[28] Wald, 2000, op.cit.: 3.

her statement is equally true of the film, as proven by the scene in which Miles (as Harry White) effortlessly hails a cab for a "brother" for whom he sees several racist drivers refusing to stop.

Having said this, both texts also portray the functioning of racial prejudice in its converse manifestation: i.e. non-white on white. In some respects, the very manner of Murphy's performance of Mr. White, for instance, described by Wald as a "silly-putty complexioned character," plays up to the deprecatory perceptions that some non-whites harbour with regard to whites (the idea that white people are all uptight, that its just not 'cool' to be white, and so on): perceptions that many white people have taken to heart, and which the already (masculine) crisis-ridden white male has, in some cases, proven to be especially susceptible to (a subject that is discussed in much greater detail in chapter 4).[29] Again, *True Identity* acknowledges this also: witness, for example, Miles' reaction on first seeing his reinvented 'white' self in the mirror, or his comments to another "brother" just prior to the afore-mentioned cab-hailing scene: "[l]ook at the way these white people are walking, man … [t]hey walk with their butts real tight … if you're asking me, they're the reason God invented talcum powder!"

Another point worth noting is that *True Identity* in particular takes the brave decision to acknowledge the fact that just as non-whites unrealistic expectations of white privilege are in fact founded on a very real climate of racial inequality, so too are the white subject's hysterical fears of black violence founded on the equally real culture of inner-city black (on black) violence and criminality. The scene in question, where we see the 'white' Miles being threatened by a group of generic black and Hispanic 'gangsta' figures, illustrates the point that the realities of anti-white sentiment mean that the threat posed to the white subject by their 'Other,' is sometimes as real as that posed *for* that Other by the white hegemonic system.[30] To the extent that it could therefore be construed as providing the white viewing subject with reason to perceive themselves as (potential) victim, such a scene is of course highly relevant to the study of white masculine crisis, since the very notion of victim-hood (i.e.: vulnerability) is hardly conducive to a successful masculine subjectivity.

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[29] It should not be forgotten, however, that such perceptions can in many cases be read as the only available tools of resistance for individuals who are otherwise disempowered by the racial system.

[30] One must remember, however, that many believe the former threat to be a direct consequence of the latter. The shape, cause, and effects of the white subject's (and especially the white male subject's) fears of black violence are discussed in greater detail in chapter 3, under the heading of 'white paranoia,' and the 'black gangsta' figure is discussed further in chapter 4.

As insightful as *True Identity* and 'White Like Me' are in these respects, however, their greatest value, and the reason why I am referring to them both here, lies not in what they can tell us about the *realities* of the racial system (which as I have said, is what underlies the contemporary crisis in masculinity), but in what they can tell us about the *unreality* of racial appearances: or what Wald has called the "visual protocols of racial classification."[31] I referred above to Lenny Henry's flair for social observation. *True Identity* proves that he (like Murphy, and several other non-white comedians) has something of a flair for *racial* observation also, since his performance in the role of Harry White highlights the fact that whiteness is by no means inscribed by such things as skin colour, hair type, and physiognomic characteristics alone. Certainly, in a world still fixated with the notion of skin colour as the ultimate symbol of 'difference,' this is the first thing that is likely to be noticed by the viewing subject, closely followed by the various other 'material' changes that are effected in the transformation scene such as hair type, nose shape, and so on. Yet as Wald acknowledges, these are not the only elements that go towards forming a white identity. She states (in relation to Murphy's own transformation scene):

> "[d]ramatizing the process by which he "becomes" Mr. White, [Murphy] displays how whiteness is symbolized through an array of *seemingly embodied signs, from "white" skin colour to "white" ways of walking and talking.* At the same time, by demonstrating the ease with which "whiteness" may be appropriated for his own interests, Murphy suggests that these signs may not be as secure or as reliable as they appear."[32]

This idea of 'embodied signs' – signs which go beyond the basic level of physical appearance to encompass 'white' ways of *being* – is intriguing, and is central to this chapter's line of argument. Needless to say, we are all accustomed to the notion that people from (ostensibly) 'different' races behave in different ways, have different tastes, different aptitudes, and so on. However, what Wald is suggesting here is that rather than thinking of such differences as the more or less inevitable *consequences* of race, we should think of them as its *constitutive elements* or *ingredients*, since these are the very things through which race becomes inscribed in the bodies of formerly *un-raced* subjects. In other words, the racial sign comes first, and race itself (supposedly a 'natural,' or 'bodily' quality) comes second, and is discursively produced.

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[31] Wald, 2000, op.cit.: 3.
[32] Wald, 2000, op.cit.: 3. Emphasis is added.

In the context of *True Identity* and 'White Like Me' – both texts in which black men are made to appear white – it is perhaps no radical thing to say that the whiteness that results is, for want of a better word, a fabrication. The point is, however, that in terms of the established methods of *representing* whiteness at least, one important strand of 'white theory' suggests that *all* whiteness is artificial in nature, *even when* those being represented, as far as the racial system is concerned, 'start out' as white in the first instance. As I said, this is an important position, especially as far as this chapter's line of argument is concerned, and we will go on to look at it in greater detail in a moment. However, before doing so it is worth noting that both the film and the sketch provide support for such a view, whether in the eventual service of this 'white illusion' or not. For instance, the environments in which both Henry's and Murphy's transformations take place (a film set's make-up trailer, and a television studio's dressing room, respectively), specifically foreground the media of the moving-image as a context in which the 'manufacture' of whiteness is not just a possible, but *routine* undertaking. When Miles goes to his friend Dwayne for help in *True Identity*, all Miles says is that he needs to "disappear for a while:" in other words, his resultant whiteness comes as much of a surprise to him as it does to the viewing subject. Dwayne on the other hand, not only comes up with the idea for this white transformation, he approaches it in a manner that is nothing short of blasé. He is shown to have all of the tools for 'constructing' whiteness ready to hand; the methods he uses appear to be practised (i.e.: pre-established); and the whiteness that results is positioned as just one of so many effects or illusions of which he is capable. To the extent that Dwayne's character can thus be read as a symbol for the film industry within which his talents are employed, the message sent out by *True Identity* is that on-screen whiteness may in fact be anything but a 'true' reflection of white identity.

Returning to the strain of whiteness theory mentioned above then, as I have said, several theorists have suggested that in terms of the representation of whiteness in general, and film and television representation in particular, the artificiality of the 'whiteness' observed in the texts just described is not just the exception, but the *rule* in films and programmes that involve 'white' people and 'white' identity.[33] Wald's text, already described, forms a part of this strain, but a more important work within the context of this chapter is Gwendolyn Audrey Foster's 2003 book *Performing*

[33] Which, in mainstream terms, is of course the overwhelming majority.

Whiteness: Postmodern Re/Constructions in the Cinema.[34] A comprehensive study into the various means by which whiteness is first created, and then propagated in the cinema, Foster's book stands amidst the growing list of works which, as she comments, have in recent years sought to "destabilize the assumptions behind whiteness as a cultural norm."[35] More than a decade after the renowned American feminist Judith Butler first described gender as "*performative*" in her seminal *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Foster categorises whiteness in the same way, and reveals a whole catalogue of practices that are brought to bear in the service of constructing a cinematic whiteness that is seen on screen as simply *there*.[36] What is more, she maintains that this whiteness takes as its model not *actual* whiteness – i.e.: that which follows from the simple act of casting an (ostensibly) 'white' actor or actress – but some fantasised ideal, meaning that even white performers are forced to undergo a 'white transformation' that is every bit as deliberate, laborious and multifaceted as those described in the paragraphs above. As she comments: [w]hite performances are simulacra, falsely stabilized by master narratives that themselves are suspect, and whiteness itself is a construct that requires constant upkeep."[37]

As stated, Foster's text forms a part of a larger trend in whiteness theory, but she draws on the work of several other theorists in particular, and since her arguments are key to this chapter's own, her academic debts should be acknowledged here also. Judith Butler's name has already been mentioned, and Foster cites Butler's *Gender Trouble* as providing a framework for linking performance to identity formation, and organisation *per se*.[38] Butler's revolutionary text was remarkable for the way that it altered the way that theorists conceived the relation of sex to gender: or rather, it did not so much put an end to that relation as change its order, so that instead of seeing gender as issuing directly from the 'natural' site of sex, the actions formerly *attributed* to gender were reconceived as its *structuring principles*, which in turn attached themselves to sex as a means of upholding gender's illusionary stability. In short, it was a simple case of the switching of cause and effect. Simple it may have been, but this idea continues to be profoundly influential throughout academic work on identity many years after *Gender*

[34] Foster, op. cit.
[35] Foster, op.cit.: 1.
[36] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, London: Routledge, 1990): 173. Emphasis in original.
[37] Foster, op.cit.: 2. One need only consider the fact that a film like *True Identity* can base a two hour plotline around the incredible lengths that have to be gone to in order to maintain such a 'white simulacrum' to appreciate the truth in such a statement.
[38] See: Foster, op.cit.: 3.

Trouble's first publication, and, as she readily admits, Foster's interpretation of whiteness as performative is a testament to both its reach and longevity. As Foster comments: "[p]erformance gives the *illusion* of stability, but we should always remember that performance is a fabrication, a fake that has become a necessity in the regime of identity markers in the cinema."[39] Butler's text provides us with a means of remembering this lesson, and it is for that reason that Foster follows this comment with the oft-quoted passage in which Butler delineates the point in question:

> "[a]ccording to the understanding of identification as an enacted fantasy, or incorporation, however, it is clear that coherence is desired, wished for, idealized, and that this idealization is an effect of a corporeal signification. In other words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an integral core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means."[40]

Again, this tells us that the *sign* comes first (in this case the sign is the gender 'effect,' but the racial 'effect' can be included here also), whereas the *signified* follows on, and is constructed by means of performance.

Another theorist whose work Foster draws upon is Richard Dyer, without whom perhaps the entire discipline of whiteness studies (a term that Dyer foresaw with a sense of dread antipathy) might not have materialised. Dyer's original article 'White,' which appeared in a 1988 edition of the journal *Screen* and was subsequently worked up into his 1997 book of the same title, might be likened to Laura Mulvey's ground-breaking 1975 article 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (itself almost single-handedly responsible for triggering a new age of feminist psychoanalytic film theory), for the contribution that it has made to new ways of thinking about whiteness and white identity.[41] It is not simply in this general sense of belonging to the body of theory that Dyer's work helped to lay the foundations for that Foster's text can be said to be born

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[39] Foster, op.cit.: 3. Emphasis in original.
[40] Butler, 1990, op.cit.: 173. Qtd. in: Foster, op.cit.: 3. Emphasis in original; final sentence not quoted by Foster.
[41] Richard Dyer, "White," *Screen* 29, no. 4 (1988). Dyer, 1997, op.cit. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975). Reprinted in: Philip Rosen, ed., *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986): 198-209.

out of those of Dyer, however, since she remains in near constant dialogue with his arguments, or rather, one particular aspect of his arguments, throughout its length.

The chapter in question is the third, and is intriguingly entitled 'The Light of the World.'[42] The longest by some considerable margin, the chapter is arguably the most revelatory also, being a wide-ranging breakdown of the myriad of ways in which (to repeat the quotation of Dyer's included at this chapter's opening): "the photographic media and, *a fortiori*, movie lighting assume, privilege and construct whiteness."[43] By 'wide-ranging' I mean precisely that, for Dyer casts the gaze of analysis back to the very dawn of the moving image – and beyond – to consider the effects that race has had on the decision making processes which have had to have been overcome at every stage of the cinema's coming-to-being, from the development of its various interdependent technologies, to the establishment of its standard formal practices. The chapter begins with a current-day account that demonstrates the way in which the technology of the moving image (when used within its conventional parameters) struggles (that is, produces a look that has the appearance of being 'incorrect') when it is asked to represent those who are *not* white, and Dyer quickly gets to grips with exploring "how this comes to be and what it signifies."[44]

He starts off with the very basics, emphasising that film, and its forerunner photography are, first and foremost, "technologies of light:" a detail that as he points out, is highly significant for the simple fact that objects and skin tones of different colours reflect different amounts of light, meaning that what might be a 'correct' set-up for a person with very light skin will not be the same as that required for a person whose skin is very dark.[45] In one sense, therefore, Dyer is talking about the specific limitations of a technology here, but as he notes: "[w]hy a technology is even explored, why that exploration is funded, what is actually done with the result (out of all the possible things that could be done with it), these are not determined by purely technical

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[42] See: Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 82-144
[43] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.
[44] Dyer, op.cit.: 83. The account in question details an incidence in which a television show's producer is setting up the on-screen look prior to going on air. The producer makes a remark about the number of black people in the audience's front rows, and after an engineer misunderstands his meaning, he clarifies the remark by saying that his concern is due to "a mere technical matter, a question of lighting – 'it just looks a bit down.'" Dyer uses this scenario as an example of the way that film and television representations are at their most fundamental level implicated in racist politics, in the sense that both the technologies involved, and the standard methods for their use, "produce a look that assumes, privileges, and constructs an image of white people." See: Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 82-83.
[45] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 85, 89.

considerations."[46] Dyer goes on to outline the many different light variables that are involved in each and every film image in addition to the properties of the subject (a category into which skin colour fits): from the sensitivity of the film stock, the character, direction, and strength of the lighting, the length of the exposure, the development of the film stock, to the specifications of the projector. Although each of these variables has gone through various individual developmental stages, and although each change of the one has necessitated the adjustment of all, Dyer maintains that a "fairly consistent sense of what light in film should be" has been in play throughout the history of cinema's development, and that this has "acted as both a benchmark and goal for most innovations and variations."[47] He continues: "[t]his is embodied in a style of lighting developed by the 1920's which became and remains so widespread that it can be referred to as, for instance, 'cinema lighting' … the 'film look' … [or, in his preference] 'movie lighting.'"[48]

The characteristics of movie lighting are relatively straightforward, but entail a catalogue of decisions that have been made on the basis of race. Most discernible in terms of the light directed at the subject (i.e. lighting in the general sense), movie lighting's principle purpose is, according to Dyer: "to ensure that what is most important in a shot is clearly visible to the audience."[49] Though not always, it is usually people – which in reality tends to mean faces – who take the place of what is most important in a shot, and this necessitates a lighting set up that will ensure that they are sufficiently visible against whatever background is being used.[50] As Dyer notes, the established solution to this problem has been to set up the lighting for a shot in two separate stages, "once for the overall setting, once for the people in it, with the latter referred to as the 'figure lighting.'"[51] One of the more interesting consequences of this is that because its job is to illuminate what is generally the most important element in a shot, figure lighting tends to be apportioned far greater significance than its counterpart, to the extent that the overall look (and, following the emergence of colour film, colour balance) of the shot might even be sacrificed in the service of creating the 'right' look

[46] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 83.
[47] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 85-6
[48] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 86.
[49] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 86.
[50] Paraphrase, Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 86.
[51] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 86. Very often, there will be considerable differences between the figure lighting used for shots of different focal lengths, a point for which Dyer gives the example of the diffused light and soft focus used for close-ups of white women. The implications of such practices upon perceptions of white people and whiteness will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent sections.

for the performers on screen.[52] Typically, creating this look requires the use of several lights – three at a minimum – which, as Dyer summarises, consist of a "primary light (the *key*), giving general illumination of the figure, a second, softer light (the *fill*), eliminating some of the shadows created by the key and other set lighting, and *backlighting*, which serves to keep the figure separate from the background as well as creating, when wanted, the rim and halo effects of heroic and glamour lighting."[53] As Dyer, and subsequently Foster comments: [t]he sense of the normality of this is still pervasive" – both in film and television – and the fact that this ostensibly 'normal' aesthetic practice is in no way a 'blank' (as in not politically motivated) means of representation, but one which specifically privileges white people, can be seen clearly in the afore mentioned account with which Dyer opens his chapter. In other words, the fact that the 'normal' lighting set up also happens to be the 'correct' lighting set up for creating a certain look of whiteness is no coincidence, and is an effect of white racial privilege.

As well as this lighting standard, Dyer reveals that several other elements of the moving image have contributed to creating this certain look of whiteness also, most notably: film stock and make-up use. At its most basic, film stock is a chemically treated light-reactant surface; a photographic image comprises a single frame of such a surface; and a cinematic image comprises a succession of frames with light shining through them, which when moved through at 24 f/s (frames per second) appear to move, owing to the optical phenomenon known as the 'persistence of vision.'[54] As I have said, the specifics of the light that reaches the film stock effects the image that results, and thus a shot's lighting set-up is one way of controlling the look that is achieved in the final image. Even before this, however, the specifics of the film stock – namely: *how* the surface is chemically treated, with *what* chemicals, and what *material* that surface happens to be – all determine the precise way in which the stock will react to that light in the first instance, giving rise to a preceding set of variables, and (especially in the earlier days of cinema) imposing its own set of limitations. Discussing the development of photographic stock, Dyer describes the way in which the search for the 'ideal' level at which these variables should be set entailed a distinctly race-related imperative; as he

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[52] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 93. Quoting: Kinden, Gorham. 'Hollywood's Conversion to Colour: The Technological, Economic, and Aesthetic Factors,' *Journal of the University Film Association* 31.2 (1979): 35.
[53] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 87.
[54] Paraphrase. Dyer, 1997. cop.cit.:85.

states: "[i]n the history of photography and film, getting the right image meant getting the one which conformed to prevalent ideas of humanity. This included ideas of whiteness, of what colour – what range of hue – white people wanted white people to be."[55] Moreover, he emphasises that this corresponded not to the colour that white people *actually* were, but to the colour that they were preferred to be; in other words: "'a whiter shade of white.'"[56] In reality this meant that experiments with different stocks, emulsions, and so on were conducted with a certain idea of how white people should look as the benchmark for a particular stock's desirability, which of course led to a standard for film stock becoming established which at the most fundamental level, assumed, privileged, and constructed whiteness, to use Dyer's terminology.[57]

Despite these efforts, Dyer points out that at various stages in the cinema's history, film stock has faced considerable problems in achieving the right 'look' for the white face. For instance, he notes that: "[t]he earliest stock, orthochromatic, was insensitive to red and yellow, rendering both colours dark," and that even the lightest shade of the former would appear in the developed image as "black."[58] Since the skin tone designated as white is, as Dyer observes, actually "reasonably light-red," this had obvious racial connotations.[59] A testament to the importance that was attached to the task of representing the white performers in the desired fashion is the lengths to which film makers went to 'correct' this effect. One such 'corrective practice' was the afore-mentioned lighting style to which Dyer gives the name of 'movie lighting' (which, you will remember, remains the model for film and television lighting to this day).[60] Another was make-up, since the performers were made to wear a thickly applied layer of white face paint: the unnaturalness of which within today's technological parameters has subsequently been made clear in films that have attempted to recreate this period of

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[55] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 90.

[56] Dyer, 1997, op.cit. 93. Quoting: Winston, Brian, 'A Whole Technology of Dying: A Note on Ideology and the Apparatus of the Chromatic Moving Image,' *Daedalus* 114.4 (1985): 121.

[57] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 86. This has of course been somewhat complicated with the increasing prevalence of video as an alternative to conventional film in cinema uses, but Dyer explains that the development of video technology in the 1970's was also founded on a racial basis. He states: "the 3M Corporation developed a special television signal, to be recorded on videotape, for the purpose of evaluating tapes. This signal, known as 'skin,' was of a pale orange colour and was intended to duplicate the appearance on a television set of white skin … The whole process centred on blank images representing nothing, and yet founded in the most explicit way on a particular human flesh colour." Dyer, op.cit.: 94.

[58] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 91.

[59] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 91.

[60] For instance, Dyer explains that "one of the principle benefits of the introduction of backlighting, in addition to keeping the performer clearly separate from the background, was that it ensured that blonde hair looked blonde." Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 92. The racial connotations of blonde hair (genuinely blonde hair, either naturally occurring or dyed, is only ever found in Caucasian peoples) have been written about at length by racial theorists.

cinema and its working practices, such as 1992's *Chaplin*, and 2000's *Shadow of the Vampire*.[61] Coupled with a lighting-scheme that used carbon arc lights, this make-up counteracted the blacking effect, but the system was fraught with problems. The arc lights, Dyer explains, were "so hot that they made the make-up run, involving endless retouching;" their intensity, and the fine dust that they produced, made the performer's eyes "swollen and pink," which caused them to appear on film "big and dark, in other words, not very 'white;'" and in both cases, this made the filming process slow and labour intensive, since it required constant interruptions to safeguard the performer's well-being, and to "avoid the (racially) wrong look."[62] Many of these problems could have been avoided by using incandescent tungsten lights as an alternative to arcs, but since the light that they produced contained high saturations of red and yellow, this would have resulted in a blackening of white skin tones also: thus the need for remaining with arcs, despite their many problems.[63]

As time progressed and new film stocks – and particularly colour film – were introduced, new problems were faced, involving their own set of corrective strategies, the most important of which is discussed in section 2.2. Yet through all of this, a specific – not to mention exaggerated – notion of whiteness and the white face has persisted as the benchmark for what constitutes a desirable, and to some extent, accurate image of how a person should look. As Dyer summarises:

> "[s]tocks, cameras and lighting were developed taking the white face as the touchstone. The resultant apparatus came to be seen as fixed and inevitable, existing independently of the fact that it was humanly constructed. It may be – certainly was – true that photo and film apparatuses have seemed to work better with light-skinned peoples, but that is because they were made that way, not because they could be no other way."[64]

This is but a brief review of some of the many points and revelations that Dyer makes in the chapter, and it has not even touched on what he considered to be his most important point – that throughout painting, photography and cinema, there is a persistent sense that white people have a "special affinity" with the kind of light which comes from above –

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[61] *Chaplin* (Richard Attenborough, Carolco Pictures/Canal+/RCS Video/Lambeth Productions Corporation/Tristar Pictures, UK/USA/France/Italy, 1992). *Shadow of the Vampire* (E.Elias Merighe, BBC Films/Delux Productions/Long Shot Pictures/Luxembourg Film Fund/Metrodome Films/Pilgrim Films Ltd./Saturn Films/Shadow of the Vampire Ltd., UK/USA/Luxembourg, 2000).
[62] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 91-2.
[63] Paraphrase, Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 92.
[64] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 90.

but it does (I hope) give some impression of the breadth of his arguments, and their usefulness for a 'racially aware' film analysis.

This by no means brings an end to our discussion of Dyer's text, since we will be returning to it at various points throughout this chapter, but I would like to bring the focus back to Foster's work for a moment, and to briefly explain how she draws on Dyer's arguments in developing her own mode of analysis, before moving on to consider in the next section, what this might reveal in the context of the contemporary British cinema of white masculine crisis. Her emphasis on whiteness as a performative category has already been mentioned, and she relates this to two new concepts, "whiteface," and its complement in terms of the cinematic milieu, "*white space*."[65] The first relates in part to the make-up practice just discussed – namely: the need for (ostensibly) white performers to appear on screen wearing a "performative facial mask" of whiteness – which she sees as proof of the "instability of whiteness and the lengths to which [film] practitioners went to establish white as the norm."[66] She also notes that this practice was mirrored in real-life performances of whiteness, especially in the early twentieth century, to which she comments: [f]or the purpose of public performance, either live or on screen, it seemed that white people themselves were not quite *white* enough. To create the illusion of whiteness, they need to be covered in a gluelike white face paint and perform in a sort of whiteface."[67] The point to be emphasised here is that as Foster acknowledges, this practice (like movie lighting) continues in television, theatre, and film make-up techniques to this day: something of which anyone who has been present on a film or television set, or in a backstage dressing room, will no doubt be aware.[68] Moreover, Foster's concept of whiteface does not just relate to make-up use, since she sees it as also being embodied in "careful lighting" techniques (these being the same lighting techniques that Dyer referred to as 'movie lighting'), and in an "insistence on the binaries of black and white." In other words, 'whiteface' as a term

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[65] Foster, op.cit.: 3. Emphasis in original.
[66] Foster, op.cit.: 4, 3.
[67] Foster, op.cit.: 4.
[68] During 2007 I was fortunate enough to have spent some time on a film set, and to have experienced this practice first hand. Having been cast as an extra during some scenes for the upcoming *Young Victoria* (directed by the French Canadian director Jean-Mark Vallee and starring Jim Broadbent, Miranda Richardson and Emily Blunt), not only was I able to see how heavily the principle performers were made-up (and how much attention was paid to ensuring they remained that way), I was also to see that the extras were treated in a similar way: myself included. Whenever I happened to be in shot I was made acutely aware of the fact, simply by the sudden attention that was paid to me by the hair and make-up team, who rushed to apply a lightening anti-shine powder so as to ensure that I looked sufficiently 'white.'

covers all of the control techniques that are brought to bear in representations of white people: techniques whose sole purpose is, Foster purports, to fake and norm "a look of whiteness that is itself a grotesque parody, a parody as bizarre, in a way, as that of blackface."[69]

'*White space*' is effectively a product of 'whiteface:' the latter relates to the individual, the former to the cinematic milieu. Put another way, the pervasiveness of whiteface performance in the cinema has, according to Foster, "defined the cinematic landscape as a white space."[70] In the simplest sense, this has to do with the construction of the world as a space in which only white people exist, or if a situation does call for the admittance of a non-white person into that world, they must at the very least be clearly marked as 'Other.' This is by no means to say that the world is presented as a flat and homogeneous space, or that it disavows difference entirely, a point that Foster attempts to emphasise through a quotation from American literary theorist Patricia McKee: "[in] twentieth-century public life, there is a wide range of images of whiteness. White persons, therefore, can experience their identity not merely as self-same but as diverse."[71] As Foster states: "[t]he nature of white space is uncanny: it is a space both open and closed, both inclusive and exclusive," meaning that it bears a resemblance to the real world in terms of its diversity, but always contains that diversity within strictly controlled parameters.[72] Although race is by far and away the *most* strictly controlled grounds on which these parameters are drawn, Foster maintains that class is also subject to tight restrictions, and that like race, 'difference' in class terms – which in reality means lower or working-class statuses – "must be either erased or seen as clearly other."

Summarising, Foster brings these two concepts – whiteface, and white space – into a complete paradigm, and in the process, provides us with a framework for analysis which I suggest is invaluable for interpreting a group of films that as I have said, represent the very most *popular* side of white masculine crisis in contemporary British cinema, as well as containing a valuable lesson that one would do well to remember throughout the rest of this thesis.

> "[T]his white space, where exchanges of identity are negotiated, is the space of whiteface, where class and ethnicity are homogenized, sterilized, and largely

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[69] Foster, op.cit.: 4.
[70] Foster, op.cit.: 47.
[71] Foster, op.cit.: 50. Quoting: Patricia McKee. *Producing American Races: Henry James, William Faulkner, Toni Morrison*. (*Durham* NC: Duke University Press, 1999): 14.
[72] Foster, op.cit.: 50.

> erased in motion pictures. In other words, when I use the term *whiteface*, I do not mean the opposite of blackface. I regard whiteface as a space where representation that demands class-passing, class othering, giving up ethnic identity to become white, and insists that the human race … is white. In short, most motion pictures are spaces of whiteface."[73]

To avoid forcing this section's last word onto someone else, I will simply say that as we shall see, the contemporary British cinema, as well being a space of masculine crisis, is also a space of *whiteface*.

1.2) *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, *Notting Hill*, and *Love Actually*: Whiteface and the Three Ages of Richard Curtis.

It is uncommon that as film theorists, researchers, critics, or even fans, we should talk about a particular screenwriter's contribution to the cinema, or talk about their work in terms of it representing a 'canon,' when compared with, say, a particular director. Whilst the names of Abel Gance, John Ford, Sergei M. Eisenstein, Alfred Hitchcock, Frederico Fellini, Stanley Kubrick, Martin Scorcese (I could go on and on), all immediately conjure up images of a certain style, or thoughts of commonly tackled themes, the names of most screenwriters remain, for many people, meaningless pieces of information that only play on the screen long after we have already walked out of the cinema. There are of course exceptions to this rule, however: a recent example being the U.S. screenwriter Charlie Kaufman, whose name has become synonymous since his 1999 scripted *Being John Malkovich* with contemporary cinematic surrealism. The British screenwriter Richard Curtis is another such exception.

Although he already had a successful career as a comedy writer for television (most notably in respect of the much loved *Blackadder* series'), Curtis's reputation for sensitive, intelligent, fiendishly funny, and acutely *British* comedy was in large part forged on the basis of his 1994 scripted *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, directed by Mike Newell.[74] A film which, in many ways, marked the dawn of what I have called the 'contemporary British film revival,' *Four Weddings* is especially notable for the way in which it demonstrates that this cinema began as a site that presented masculinity as

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[73] Foster, op.cit.: 51.
[74] *Blackadder*. (Various directors, BBC Two, British Broadcasting Corporation, 1982-1999). *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. (Mike Newell, Channel Four Films/Polygram Filmed Entertainment/Working Title Films, UK, 1994).

being in crisis, and for its adherence to the representative strategy that Foster designates as whiteface. Others have written about the film (in fact, considering its success – it was, for a period, the most highly grossing British film of all time – it is likely to have had more ink expended in its name than most other contemporary British films put together), but none have acknowledged this.[75] Robert Murphy, for instance, observes that *Four Weddings*: "explore[d] Curtis's own world, with Hugh Grant standing in for him in the way Jean-Pierre Leaud did for Truffault in his Antoine Doinel Films."[76] Significantly, although Murphy mentions Curtis's 'world,' he does not comment on that world's gendered or racial character. The former (that is, the film's relation to gender) *has* been acknowledged by a few. Claire Monk, for example, goes so far as to list the film amongst a whole group of others as demonstration of her assertion that: "to an unprecedented extent, 1990's British cinema seemed preoccupied with men and masculinity in crisis."[77] Similarly, Andrew Spicer has referred to *Four Weddings*' protagonist, Charles (Hugh Grant), as a characterisation that conforms to "one of the most widely discussed recent constructions of masculinity:" the 'New Man,' which he relates specifically to the search for "new images and visions of masculinity in the wake of feminism and the men's movement" – in other words, to masculine crisis.[78] Whilst I can find no reason to object to any of these statements in themselves, nevertheless I feel they might have been improved had they acknowledged what even the most cursory 'racially aware' analysis makes obvious: that the film's milieu is one of white space, and that correspondingly, its characters perform in whiteface.

Whilst discussing my plans for this chapter with friends and colleagues, one of the responses offered was that *Four Weddings* was "a *very* white film." This is a statement with which I am in wholehearted agreement. *All* of the film's principle characters are white, and in its entire two hour running time, there is but one brief shot, lasting a mere 2 seconds, that hints at contemporary Britain's actual racial make-up being not comprised solely of the homogeneous white space that occupies the majority

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[75] Andrew Spicer, "The Reluctance to Commit: Hugh Grant and the New British Romantic Comedy," in *The Trouble with Men: Masculinities in European and Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Phil Powrie, Ann Davies, and Bruce Babington (London: Wallflower Press, 2004): 80. Quoting: Roddick, N. 'Four Weddins and a Final Reckoning' (*Sight and Sound*, 5.1): 13-15.

[76] Robert Murphy, ed., *British Film in the 90's* (London: BFI Publishing, 2000): 9.

[77] Claire Monk, "Men in the 90's," in *British Cinema of the 90's*, ed. Robert Murphy (London: British Film Institute Publishing, 2000): 156.

[78] Andrew Spicer, *Typical Men: The Representation of Masculinity in Popular British Cinema* (London, New York: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2001): 187. Quoting:Rowena Chapman, "The Great Pretender: Variations on the New Man Theme," in *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity*, ed. Rowena Chapman, and Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988): 226.

of the film, (although it should be noted – and this a point that I will return to later – that the shot in question is, as Foster suggested, clearly framed within the context of difference). Bearing this in mind, it seems all the more remarkable that the film was construed as being 'quintessentially' British or English, as countless commentators in the public realm claimed at the time of its release, for one thing that is certain is that if *this* is a vision of the nation, it is not one that many non-white British people will recognise. Moreover, it is not as if the film contains any pretext that attempts to explain this 'whitewashing' representative strategy, as it might have done had its events been set within a context that was *acknowledged* to be restrictive, such as a small village or an island community (contemporary British examples of which are 2003's *Calendar Girls*, and 1998's *Waking Ned*).[79] As its title suggests, the film's events are for the most part set against the backdrop of a succession of weddings, which by their very nature entail a cross section of society, and (assuming that a liberal outlook is suggested, which is likely to be the case in this age of political correctness) this would normally include a cross-section of races. Furthermore, in those scenes *not* set during weddings (and excepting that set during the funeral – another environment that entails a cross-section of society – there is only one of these), the events are transferred to London's South Bank and Embankment, locations which despite connoting a certain bourgeois culturalism, are also definitively cosmopolitan. In the sense that these are *public* spaces, their inclusion in the white space milieu indicates that they are likely to have been subject to strict racial controls during the filming process, since this is the only way that an exclusively white look could have been ensured. In other words, in *Four Weddings* we see precisely the kind of 'uncanny' space that Foster spoke of as white space, which through its representation of contemporary Britain and its (for some perhaps) familiar scenes, resembles the one that we know from the real world, but resembles it in such a way that it appears to have been subject to the most thorough process of racial 'cleansing.'

In cinematic terms, *Four Weddings*' extreme whiteness is attributable to a great deal more than just its non-inclusion of non-white people, however. Rather, it is a product of all of those racially influenced forms of control that we discussed in the last section under the heading of whiteface. Virtually any scene might be picked at random and shown to adhere to the principles of whiteface, but for the purposes of clarity, let us

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[79] *Calendar Girls* (Nigel Cole, Harbour Pictures/Touchstone Pictures, UK/USA, 2003). *Waking Ned* (Kirk Jones, Tomboy Films/Gruber Bros./Mainstream S.A./Bonaparte Films/Isle of Man Film Commision/Overseas Films Group/Canal+, UK, France/USA, 1998).

look at the opening episode (i.e. the first wedding, between Angus and Laura) to see how the film goes about establishing its milieu as one of white space.

Following a brief but hilarious preamble as best man Charles struggles to reach the church on time (a scene surely notable for the amount of times the word 'fuck' is said during the opening few minutes of a recent British film), the episode proper begins, in true Classical Hollywood style, with an inter-title in the form of a carefully framed invitation to the wedding in question. Set on a white cloth and brightly lit from the left, the plain white card, garlanded with delicately pink rose petals, with its simple and understated typeface, immediately sets the tone for the episode to come (and by 'tone' I mean both the mood and the predominant colour theme, since the image is *quite literally* overwhelmingly white), as well as for the film in general. Opening on the interior of the church, the lighting style is immediately obvious as belonging to a type that is shaped by the same kind of racial agenda that Dyer identifies in 'movie lighting.' As anyone who has attempted to take photographs at a church wedding only to be disappointed with the dark or flash-burned images that result will know, it is incredibly difficult to achieve on film the kind of light quality that these scenes possess. Churches, as a rule, appear dark to human eyes, and thus it is hardly surprising that even the fastest modern films, with their far *lesser* sensitivity, often struggle to realise what we understand to be an 'acceptable' image (i.e.: one that is bright, or rather, *white*, enough).[80] Yet *this* church is flooded with light, to the extent that shadows are all but eliminated, and the sea of white faces that make up the wedding's guests (fig. 1, overleaf), and even the walls themselves, appear to *glow*. Heads, hats, and hair glow with light from above, and the whole scene, as well as conforming to the racial and class passing models that Foster identifies as symptomatic of whiteface (for this is as homogeneous a picture of class as it is of race) seems ablaze.

Discussing the different qualities of light in film, Dyer speaks at length about light that comes from above, and relates it specifically to the privileging of whiteness and white people. Although in many settings this kind of light is unnaturalistic (during the daytime, for instance, interior light tends to come more often – or at least

[80] Although it should be noted that churches, and places of worship in general, though dark overall, are, in a way, among the very first forms of 'light technology,' since barring theatres, they were the first mechanisms (read: spaces) within which light was manipulated in order to achieve a particular effect on a 'viewing public,' and in that sense, are forerunners of the cinema.

Fig.1

more prominently – from a window than from above), Dyer notes that "in the movies there is always light from on high."[81] In other words, light from above is the effect achieved by the omnipresent lighting style termed by Dyer as 'movie lighting.' Such a light, Dyer explains, had become established as the ideal model for lighting in the cinema by the early part of the twentieth century, and had come to be known as "'North' or 'Northern' light."[82] Referring in one sense to the practice of always orienting a set's main light source from the North, North light in the more general sense denoted the kind of light which, according to Barry Salt (whom Dyer refers to), "comes into a room in daytime through a large north-facing window, or some arrangement that produces an identical effect.'"[83] The room in which I write these words contains such a window, and the character of its light is, as Dyer suggests, "soft," "steeply slanted", and most importantly, "*white.*"[84] This is perhaps one reason for its becoming seen as a 'better' form of light than any other, but there are other reasons also. Dyer mentions a number of ways in which the North is symbolic of a certain sense of superiority: he notes, for instance, that in the Western geographical discourse, the North is situated

[81] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 116.
[82] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 118.
[83] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 118. Quoting: Salt, Barry. *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis* (London: Starwood, 1983).
[84] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 118. Emphasis is added.

above the South; that it is home to Northern Europeans, "the whitest whites"; and that its cold temperatures and rugged landscapes are suggestive of the Christian ethics of "vigour, cleanliness, piety and enterprise".[85] Yet the most convincing reason why this light has become established as the norm in film (and television) representation is that as Dyer states: [w]hite people come off best from this standardised, Northern light, such that they seem to have a special affinity with it, to be enlightened, to be the recipient, reflection and maybe even the source of the light of the world."[86] In short, Northern light is an aesthetic of white racial privilege.

Going back to the scene in question then, we can now put a name not only to the lighting's *style* – 'movie lighting' – but also to the *quality* of the light – Northern light – as well as understand that this light has certain racial implications, the character of which we have a good idea also. For instance, the scene's virtual lack of shadows (and it is worth noting here that Dyer identifies shadows – that is, areas of *darkness* – as signifying 'race') is indicative of Northern light, which is itself symbolic of superior and virtuous whiteness.[87] The scene's brilliance is in part a product of the intensity of this light, but is also an effect of the careful controls on light that are imposed within the 'movie lighting' style, as well as being dependant upon the cinema apparatuses' natural (read: *pre-determined*) bias towards the reproduction of so-called 'white' skin tones. Moreover, the elements of class and racial passing – symptomatic of white space – are, as I have said, in strong evidence also. And perhaps most importantly, the on-screen subjects perform in a mask of whiteface: both literally (owing to the standard for make-up laid down by the original whiteface performers), and metaphorically (inasmuch as they all wear the same 'uniform' for whiteness, and all perform the same 'tics' of speech, body language, and movement that have been enacted so brilliantly by non-white impersonators of whiteness such as those discussed at this chapter's opening).

The racial symbolism of the scene becomes even more marked with the entry of the bride. First shot looking head-on down the aisle, she appears, dressed all in white, accompanied by her proudly doting father: himself a classic picture of virtuous white masculinity. Framed in the church's open doorway, she seems in relative darkness at first (due to the brightness outside), all except for her veil (an effective diffuser), which, picking up the available light, seems to glow, surrounding her head and shoulders with a

[85] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 118.
[86] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 118.
[87] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 96.

Fig.2

luminescent quality (though her face itself is, like the rest, fairly in darkness). Advancing up the aisle, she becomes gradually brighter and brighter (an effect compounded by the various flashes from the cameras of those members of the guests who are shown to be taking precisely the kind of photos to which I have just referred). After various shot-reverse-shot sequences which show her (increasingly white) beauty to be appreciated by all (with minor exceptions for comedic purposes), the image cuts to a medium close-up, shot from her right side, as she passes in front of a large side-window through which a soft, white, and steeply slanting light falls (i.e. a virtuous and Northern light), so that her veil, her blond hair, and of course the white skin of her face (which is turned towards the light) appears to glow (fig.2, above). As she joins her proud husband-to-be, the image cuts to a head-on torso shot of the pair exchanging a look (she partially obscured by the priest's white robe, which fills the bottom two-thirds of the right side of the screen with whiteness); (Fig. 3, overleaf). Still her veil, face, and hair seem to glow, and he, lit predominantly from the left and from above (though noticeably darker than her overall), has a touch of light on his brow, which, due to her brightness, almost seems to be coming from his virtuous bride herself. And through all this Charles looks on, having so far failed in his duties as best man (not only was he late but he even forgets the rings), and as he confesses later in his speech, unable to make

Fig.3

the commitment necessary if he is to gain his own virtuous bride: a prime example of the crisis-ridden white male.

As I have said, all white skin glows thus under Northern light, and all white people, as a result of that glow, may seem to have an affinity with such a light, may seem to be its source. However, Dyer suggests that *some* white people glow more than others (in fact, I would take that even further to say that some white people are not even white at all: a point I discuss further in chapter 3), and that the most extreme instance of the glowing white person is reserved for the representation, or rather, the *construction* of "an image of the ideal white woman within heterosexuality," to use Dyer's words.[88] Dyer dedicates an entire section in his chapter to what he calls "the characteristic glow of white women," which is an indication of just how significant a feature this representative strategy is on the cinematic landscape.[89] He illustrates that there is a long and complex history of symbolising idealised white femininity via means of a light from within, or via allusion to a special relationship between white women and light (especially light that comes from above, which as Dyer observes, also has "celestial," as in 'spiritual' connotations), and that this runs not only through the history of the moving image, but also through photography, painting, and the theatre.[90] The section contains a

[88] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 122.
[89] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 87.
[90] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 118.

number of analyses of scenes from films that demonstrate this tendency, one of which is particularly interesting in that its representation of an idealised white female bears a marked resemblance to Laura's portrayal in the scene I have just described. The scene in question is from the 1919 film *Broken Blossoms*, directed by D. W. Griffith, (who, incidentally, by this time was avowedly anti-racist, a surprising claim considering this film's alternative title: *Broken Blossoms or the Yellow Man and the Girl*). For clarity's sake, I quote the passage in full below.[91]

"The shot starts in near darkness, with just a little light on Gish's shoulder [Lillian Gish, who played the lead character, Lucy]; she is framed from the chest up and to the right of the image, so that well over half the screen is in darkness. As the scene continues, however, and as Cheng [the eponymous yellow man, played by the decidedly 'un-yellow' Richard Barthelmess] continues to gaze at her, both lights grow stronger and wider until finally most of her face is in light, her body is rimmed with light and parts of the wall behind her are softly lit. The light is the dawning recognition by him of her goodness, which awakens his chaste desire."[92] (See: Figs. 4-7, below).

Figs. 4-7

[91] *Broken Blossoms or the Yellow Man and the Girl* (D. W. Griffith, D. W. Griffith Productions, Paramount Pictures, US, 1919).
[92] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 137.

The light effect described here is obviously unnaturalistic, but a similar effect could have been achieved had Gish walked towards (or within the range of) an on-screen source of light: which of course, is precisely what Laura does as she walks up the aisle in *Four Weddings*.[93] What is more, the similarities do not end there. For instance, Dyer explains that Lucy's increasing brightness whilst she is subjected to Cheng's gaze is a visual metaphor for his 'recognition of her goodness,' and his coming-to-being as a desiring subject within heterosexuality. Laura too is subjected to the male's desiring gaze: her entry into the church is immediately preceded by a shot of Angus (the groom, and the man who is about to take 'possession' of her within the traditional interpretation of the Christian marriage contract) turning round to look as the first bars of the Bridal March begin to play, which effectively frames the entire scene, and her increasing brightness, in relation to his look – just as Lucy's is framed in relation to Cheng's. And finally, in *Broken Blossoms*, there is a sense that the world around Lucy, and particularly Cheng himself, are illuminated *by* her (note the 'softly lit' back wall, and the spiritual 'enlightening' which, along with his love, drives his actions for the remainder of the film). Looking back to the shot of Angus and Laura at the altar – she glowingly white, he seemingly lit by *her* – the comparison is obvious, and thus it seems markedly *understated*, especially considering the gulf of years that separates these films, to assert that the image of the glowing white woman is an enduring one.

As Dyer has commented, in cultural representations of idealised white women, they are always: "bathed in and permeated by light. It streams through them and falls on to them from above. In short, they glow."[94] (It should be emphasised here that Dyer takes pains to distinguish *glow* from *shine*, since this has animalistic connotations, and is used to denote lower class, and particularly non-white status: a point I will return to later). This image very quickly spilled over from the purely cultural sphere to effect an ideal for feminine beauty to which all women – regardless of race – were made to feel they should aspire: thus the language and imagery of cosmetics advertising, with its promises of 'glow,' 'translucence,' 'purity' and (protection from) 'shine' or '*dark* circles.'[95] Blonde hair provided another way for women to attain that glow, which

[93] Although as we have seen, there is little that is 'natural' about the light in the *Four Weddings* scene also, it is simply that it is less *obviously* unnaturalistic to our accustomed eyes.
[94] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 122.
[95] Paraphrase, Dyer. 1997, op.cit.: 122. As Dyer explains, a wide range of skin-lightening creams were marketed to non-white women who were in pursuit of this ideal of beauty, which promised that "they too could glow (like, by implication, white women)." The racism inherent in such products was of course palpable. Dyer, 1997.op.cit.: 122.

perhaps explains why such effort was gone to in the early days of the cinema to ensure that blonde hair looked blonde on screen (according to Dyer, this was one of the principle reasons for the development of backlighting, which as he comments, "also enabled the production of this effulgent dazzle."[96] More importantly, white clothing: Dyer states that it "can also give that glow, no more so than in bridal wear." [97] In other words, the white skinned, blonde-haired bride, in her white dress (a relatively new feature of weddings, dating to around the mid-nineteenth century only), and her *white* veil (which Dyer relates specifically to the effecting of a "radiant look"), is perhaps the ultimate expression of the image of the glowing (read: glowingly pure) white woman in heterosexuality.[98]

It is worth noting at this juncture that *Four Weddings*' diegetic logic does not lie in support of the institution of marriage as such. Whilst the entire film may be based around the notion, the constant round of weddings, coupled with comments such as "who is it today?" has the effect of downplaying marriage's significance, or even undermining it, since it is made to seem like a routine undertaking, devoid of any real meaning. What is more, as Spicer reports, the film's plotline culminates in a romantic union that takes the form of a "disavowal of marriage," with the lead characters promising "*not* to marry" each other for the rest of their lives (a scene which comes on the back of a 'non-wedding,' since Charles jilts 'Duckface' Henrietta (Anna Chancellor) at the altar).[99] Yet even in a film such as this, which displays several reservations to marriage quite openly, still the hand of convention weighs heavily enough to ensure that the representation of the wedding scene (what Dyer has called the "privileged moment of heterosexuality, that is, (racial) reproduction"), conforms to all the standard traits that it is supposed to possess, and the most marked of these is as I have suggested, the image of the glowingly pure white woman.[100]

Returning once more to the scene in question then, we can now detect the presence not only of movie lighting, with its careful manipulation of Northern light as a means of representing (read: constructing) the whitest possible image of whiteness, but also that of a register of visual symbolism that is tied to both racial and gendered meaning. We have seen that the various elements of the wedding scene – the radiant

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[96] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 124.
[97] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 124.
[98] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.; 124.
[99] Spicer, 2004, op.cit.: 80. Quoting: Geoff King. *Film Comedy* (London: Wallflower Press, 2002): 57.
[100] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 124.

bride, the white dress, and so on – all form part of an inherently race-related imperative, and that this in turn forms a part of what Dyer has called "the sexual reproductive economy of race."[101] This works on one level to differentiate between races, and on another to differentiate between the sexes, using all the forms of control of which Foster has named the whitespace milieu the owner, but to a more complex end than has been acknowledged up to now. Human worth has as a result come to be indexed on skin tone, with the glowing white woman held to be the ultimate embodiment of goodness and beauty, the ideal to which all should strive, capable even of passing on her 'inner light' to those around her. The white male, in contrast, is always somewhat darker in his ideal form (with darkness signifying, according to Dyer, "desire for the light"), yet he is also shown to be the recipient of her light, and to be enhanced by it in some way.[102] The spark of light at the temples or the brow, Dyer notes, is a common motif for the "light of genius," whilst dark clothing and an "upturned face combined with overhead lighting" has long been "the standard way to produce an image of (ideal, privileged) white masculinity" that is both literally and metaphorically enlightened.[103] Since the man is illuminated by the woman, these things depend on her also. As Dyer summarises: "[i]t is thus not just a matter of a different disposition of light on women and men, but the way the light constructs the relationship between them."[104]

A slightly later scene comes to mind as being particularly relevant here, for even though it represents a situation in which the above register of racially contingent gender symbolism is being used in its *reverse* context, it nevertheless relies upon that system of meaning in order to make sense. Set on the morning after the events of the wedding I have just been discussing – thus far unmentioned among which is the seduction of Charles by his enigmatic and beautiful fellow wedding-guest, Carrie (Andie McDowall), an American – the scene opens on an idealised image of pastoral England (looking every inch like a scene from the pages of a Thomas Hardy or George Eliot novel), before cutting to a close-up of Carrie's hands as she gingerly zips up a bag containing (by implication) her belongings. The image cuts again to one of Charles, lying asleep on a bed, with his back turned to the camera. The patterned bedspread and the white sheet beneath it are pulled mid-way down his back, leaving the white skin of his neck, shoulders, and part of his back exposed to the camera's gaze. A thin bar of

[101] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 121.
[102] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 139.
[103] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 120.
[104] Dyer, 1997, op.cit: 134.

light (suitably Northern in character) falls onto him from a facing window, though the rest of the scene is viewed only in a kind of half light. As the shot lingers on his part-naked form, however, the light begins to alter, and as whatever has been blocking the window moves aside (Carrie, we learn in the next shot), the bar of light grows wider, until finally the whole upper part of the bed, and especially the white pillows (which reflect light back onto Charles, brightening him ever further), along with part of the wall and the room behind, are fully in the light (fig. 8, overleaf). The effect is like the pulling of a curtain, and every bit as meaningful. At this point Charles stirs, and turning over, looks blinkingly up at the fully-clothed Carrie, who stands silhouetted in the window, fixing him in her gaze.[105]

Not only is it this reversal of the standard erotic looking relations of the cinema that signifies Charles as a de-masculinised subject in this scene (for she controls the look, and also their fate together: note, for instance, that it is Carrie who goes to Charles at the film's denouement, and not the other way around), it is also this difference in the way that each is lit, which is a reversal of its own kind. Whilst Charles is the one associated with the light, the one upon whom the light falls most fully, the one most glowing, most white (the one in the feminine position, in other words), Carrie, on the other hand, is far darker (the position normally reserved for the male), to the extent that her face is almost blotted out entirely in the first shots of her, a result of the underexposure forced by the brightness of the window at her back. It is just as Dyer says: it is not simply that the two are lit differently in this scene; it is that light is used to construct and introduce an unconventional (or rather, a gender-norm-defying) power balance in their relationship, which favouring her, continues to run throughout the film, further 'unmanning' Charles in the process. In short, the scene is a tableau of white masculine crisis, etched out in the play of light.

I referred earlier to Patricia McKee's assertion that in the cinema, white people could be both 'self-same and self-diverse': which I take to mean that whilst racial

[105] It is here that Carrie asks, deadpan: "I was wondering when you were thinking of announcing the engagement?" to which the flabbergasted Charles can only stutter something about 'that sort of thing requiring a lot of thought.' Realising (or desperately hoping) that she is joking, Charles' relief is palpable, and Carrie begins to laugh. It is clear from the very beginning that she is to hold all the cards of power in their relationship, that she is capable of manipulating him, of making him squirm like a worm on a hook, of wrong-footing him constantly, all simply by shifting her position in relation to that normally taken by the woman in the white heterosexual couple. Here she assumes that position completely (and gives Charles the shock of his life in the process); yet just as quickly she turns 180˚, rejects the whole concept of marriage, of any kind of relationship even, and promptly jets off to the other side of the world (which unsettles him even more than the first). In a later scene Charles accuses Carrie of having "ruthlessly slept with [him]" on this occasion, and in truth, that is not far off the mark.

Fig. 8

diversity is strongly guarded against, other forms of diversity are less so, except insofar as they too are subject to the first. Essentially, this is the same meaning as Dyer intended when he stated that: "[t]o be normal, even to be normally deviant (queer, crippled), is to be white."[106] Despite Dyer's rather insensitive choice of words, there is a great deal of truth in his statement; likewise in McKee's also; and it is a truth that finds no greater demonstration than in the (narrowly restricted) diversity that is found in *Four Weddings*. Although its world is, as I have said, homogenous in the extreme when compared with the real world of contemporary Britain, the film does nevertheless feature a number of 'different' types. First encountered among these is the quirky Scarlett (Charlotte Coleman): Will's plain-talking, crimson-haired, and markedly working-class flat-mate, who throughout the film acts as the perfect foil to Will's middle-class "everywhiteman," as Foster has referred to the type.[107] I will say more about Scarlett, and Curtis' other working-class characters a little later, but it suffices to say here that although her function in the diegesis is that of signifying *difference* (and little else), her difference is nevertheless portrayed strictly within the bounds of what whiteness permits.

Charles' brother David (David Bower) is another who signifies difference. His hearing-impairment is portrayed quite favourably in the film, since it is shown to be

[106] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 12
[107] Foster, op.cit.: 22.

more *enabling* than disabling, allowing him to speak his mind with impunity (Charles acting as both translator and censor in his exchanges with others), whilst it also lends him a mysteriousness that proves particularly attractive to the opposite sex. For instance, having been told that he cannot hear, his implied future wife goes quite weak at the knees, and simply sighs: "Oh! Gosh!" Furthermore, though hearing-impaired, David is shown to have the power to speak where others cannot (or dare not), since it is he (and he alone) who takes the stand to object to Charles' marriage to 'Duckface' Henrietta, and thus it is he who brings about the eventual romantic union between Charles and the woman he really loves: Carrie. Ultimately, however, David's character signifies more sameness than difference, for barring his disability, his performance of whiteface is just as complete as any other.

Sexuality is another area in which the film acknowledges there to be difference. Its inclusion of a gay couple, Gareth and Matthew (John Hannah and Simon Callow, respectively), was quite a bold move at the time of its release, and had the subject been dealt with less 'sensitively,' could seriously have hampered its chances of a successful reception, especially with regards the audiences of the so-called 'bible-belt' States in the US. (After all, history teaches us that where homosexuality treads, fears of white racial annihilation often follow). *Four Weddings* managed to avoid being labelled a 'gay film,' however, perhaps largely as a result of there being scant few references to the couple's relationship throughout, the film having to rely mainly on a series of small gestures of affection between the two to communicate a sense of its existence, since these did not run the risk of offending the audience's delicate sensibilities. No doubt it also helped that the couple's 'difference' in terms of their sexuality (a difference which cannot be seen unless those involved allow it to be seen) is manifested, in Gareth's case, in a difference that can hardly *fail to be seen*, since his eccentric manner, outlandish dress, and frankly wild dancing technique all create an impression of his being outside of the norm. Yet for all the film's embracement of difference (though whether this is really an embracing, or an emphasising of difference for voyeuristic, or even admonitory purposes, is a different matter), still the mask of whiteface is fixed as fast here as with the rest; for as Allan Berubé has commented: "the dominant image of the typical gay man is a *white* man", and thus for a typical 'untypical' gay man such as

Gareth, the same must be true by extension.[108] Moreover, this is to say nothing of the debonair Matthew, who has all the grace, wit, and urbane charm – in other words, the prototypical whiteness – of a Dirk Bogarde character. Ultimately, *Four Weddings*' may represent a world of 'difference,' but it is a difference that is contained, in racial terms, within the 'iron fortress' that is whiteness.

Before we move on to consider how things changed (or stayed the same) in the 'second age' of Richard Curtis's cinematic world, there is one final point that I would like to discuss in relation to *Four Weddings*, and it too concerns difference, as well as the 'alternative' sexual landscape that I have just been describing. As I said, the film's success testifies to the fact that it managed to escape censure in respect of its portrayal of a homosexual couple. Whether Gareth's death from a heart-attack may have been a factor in this, I would not be so presumptive as to pass judgement; but one thing that I will say is that the funeral scene that follows contains the only moments in the entire film wherein the whitespace milieu is 'dialled down' to more of an insipid grey. In one sense, this is simply a consequence of the filmmakers' intentions to convey an altered mood; the shift to a down-key lighting style: a visual cue to signify the scene's more appropriately sombre tone than the rest of the film. In another sense, however, there is a lot more to it than just this, for as was stressed in section 2.1, whitespace entails not simply a specific lighting scheme, but also other technical elements such as stock, lenses, and filters; styling elements such as make-up, and costume; as well as performance-related elements such as speech, body-language, and mannerisms; which themselves are elements of class, and racial passing. To the extent that all of these elements are involved in constructing the whitespace milieu, all are similarly involved in its being 'dimmed down.' This would, perhaps, amount to much the same thing as the first (i.e. also attributable to an intention to convey a mood more befitting of a funeral): if it were *not* for the fact that as well as being the only scene in which the whitespace milieu is 'tempered,' it is also the only scene in which explicit reference is made to Gareth's (and Matthew's) homosexuality. One cannot help wondering, therefore, if there is some implication in this that a sombre mood is what can be expected of an association with homosexuality, or even indeed that homosexuality itself is a sombre subject.

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[108] Allan Berube, "How Gay Stays White and What Kind of White It Stays," in *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness*, ed. Brigit Brander Rasmussen, Eric Klineberg, Irene J. Nixon, and Matt Wray (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2001): 234. Emphasis is added.

It would be far too harsh a move to suggest outright that *Four Weddings* as a film is homophobic in its representation of Gareth and Matthew's relationship (it does at least include the category 'gay' in its vision of the Nation, after all). Nevertheless, it is still the case that whilst the other couples in the film are able to *celebrate* their love through lavish weddings, Gareth and Matthew's 'big day' in the public eye is one from which no joy can be taken. Speaking with Tom after the funeral, Charles comments on the fact that the couple were "in effect, married": implying that the funeral scene serves as their 'wedding equivalent.' Yet the differences between the (numerous) wedding scenes and that of the funeral are marked. In lieu of pastoral/metropolitan middle-class splendour, there is industrial working-class gloom (Fig. 9, overleaf). In lieu of earnest vows and humorous speeches, there is Matthew's heart-wrenching tribute to Gareth, and his recital of W. H. Auden's achingly sad poem "Stop all the clocks."[109] And most importantly, in lieu of smiling (and glowing) wedding guests, there are stricken-faced funeral-attendees, many of whom are explicitly coded as homosexual, and one of whom is *conspicuously* non-white, for all the briefness of his appearance. His face *shines* out amongst the others, both in terms of it being noticeable, and in terms of it quite literally shining (recall, if you will, Dyer's separation of glow – a white trait – from shine – a working-class, and racially 'Other' trait – (Fig. 10, overleaf)). Given that this shot comes in a film that is, as I have said, excessive in its whiteness in every other respect, it has to be considered significant, and thus one has little choice but to conclude that this scene's, and indeed this *film's* principle aim, is to situate such forms of 'difference' as working-class status, homosexuality, and non-whiteness, if not outside of the whitespace milieu, then at least on its borders.

I would now like to turn to the second film in the Curtis 'canon,' and to consider the extent to which *it* grants white masculine crisis and whiteface performance the same degree of significance as these concerns seem to have held in *Four Weddings*. Directed by Roger Michell and released in 1999, the film's title was not, as some anticipated, 'Four Marriages and a Baby,' but *Notting Hill*.[110]

In the years running up to the film's release, there was much talk of a sequel to *Four Weddings*; fans of the original film bemoaned the long wait, and eagerly debated the validity of the latest 'insider information' on internet film sites and discussion

[109] W. H. Auden, "No. Ix of 'Twelve Songs'," in *One Hundred Favourite Poems*, ed. Mike Reid (London: Hodder and Stoughton, (1966), 1997).
[110] *Notting Hill* (Roger Michell, Polygram Filmed Entertainment/Working Title Films/Bookshop Productions/Notting Hill Pictures, UK/US, 1999).

Fig. 9

Fig.10

boards.[111] When that 'sequel' finally arrived, therefore, its success was almost guaranteed (the same combination of Curtis as scriptwriter and Grant as leading man being a particular strong point), and *Notting Hill* went on to outperform even its

[111] For example, see the forums of the International Movie Data Base (IMDB) site: >http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0109831/board/thread/21849082<, accessed 20/06/07 (the 'Four Marriages' title appeared these forums).

predecessor, grossing £30.7 million in the UK, and $116 million in the US: a set of figures which even today, places it among the highest grossing British films of all time.[112] Yet the film was not actually a sequel at all: as Spicer reports, at the time of *Notting Hill*'s release, Curtis himself, as well as several others involved at the production level, felt moved to "stress the film's autonomy and, in particular, the differences in Grant's role."[113] Indeed, there *are* a number of differences between *Notting Hill* and *Four Weddings*: but the question is, did those extend to a reversal of the latter's portrayal of white masculine crisis, or an eschewal of its persistence in whiteface performance?

Discussing the different aspects of Grant's roles in British cinema, Spicer speaks at length about *Notting Hill*, and describes it as a film that proscribes to the "New Man" model of masculinity.[114] This, you will remember, is how he also described *Four Weddings*, but he regards William Thacker – Grant's character in *Notting Hill* – to be a more complete "embodiment" of the type.[115] As I stated at the time, the new man construction is directly related to masculine crisis; in many ways it is its product, having been forged out of perceptions of a change in attitudes among *some* men towards such issues as gender equality, shared domestic labour, and the male's role in parenting. It also referred to a greater willingness to connect with feminine aspects of self, to be aware of and to share one's emotions, or to 'get in touch with one's feminine side,' to quote the popular aphorism. In effect then, the new man presented a reconfigured version of masculinity, more in line with late twentieth century expectations of male behaviour and attitudes. The point is, however, the new man construction was precisely that: a construction; it was built more on the basis of magazine articles, *that* 'man-with-baby' poster, and of course film content, than on the way that men were really coping (or *not* coping, as the case proved) in the face of the new demands being placed upon them.

A more accurate construction (though it was still a construction) was the 'new lad.' Claire Monk compares the two: "the new lad's endurance suggested that (in contrast to the new man) his media inventors had astutely tapped into a male mood (and a new lifestyle market, older and more affluent than the word lad implied) already latent

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[112] Eddie Dyja, ed., *British Film Institute Film and Television Handbook 2002* (London: British Film Institute, 2001): 39, 43. Quoted in: Spicer, 2004, op.cit.: 82.
[113] Spicer, 2004, op.cit.: 81.
[114] Spicer, 2004, op.cit.: 83.
[115] Spicer, op.cit, 2004.: 83.

in the culture."[116] In other words, the new lad was a *response* to the new man, and provided a more achievable model of masculinity for those less willing to 'realign' their behaviour/attitudes to the extent required of the latter, since it did not really require a realignment of those things at all. Both the new man and the new lad were conceived as answers to masculine crisis: but the very fact that such labels were being invented and pressed onto men as offering fresh perspectives on the category 'male,' suggests that a real climate of anxiety and confusion existed concerning the position that men (and masculinity) occupied (or were *supposed* to occupy) in a changing world. This, as far as I understand the term, is a crisis of masculinity by another name, and thus the only point that needs to be added, is that in the same way that that the typical gay man is white, so too is the typical figure of masculine crisis.

If *Notting Hill* sought to assuage men's "insecurities and confusions about manliness" – which as Spicer relates, is Andy Rutherford's opinion – then it hides the fact until the very last moment.[117] The truth is that whilst the 'nice guy' (the new man) might 'get the girl' in the end, he spends the majority of the film in abject misery. And whilst we are on the subject of the girl, this seems as good a moment as any to state that as was the case in *Four Weddings*, the figure of the white female provides the easiest way to detect whether *Notting Hill* also adheres to the whiteface/white space representative strategy, simply because it constitutes the most extreme instance of the 'white type.' Again, for clarity's sake, let us begin by looking at the opening scene (or rather, the credit sequence, since the film wastes no time in introducing its 'take' on female – and, for that matter, male – identity), to see how (or if) the film goes about establishing its milieu as one of white space, and whether (or not) its performances are those of whiteface.

The image opens on a black screen, over which can be heard cheering sounds, and a male voice (an implied broadcaster) saying: "and later this afternoon we're lucky enough to be talking to Anna Scott, Hollywood's biggest star by far." At this point the scene proper begins, opening on an image of the star in question, played by the real star Julia Roberts (fig. 11, overleaf). Shot initially in extreme close-up, her smiling face virtually fills the screen, but after a few seconds the camera pulls back slightly, framing her in a head and shoulders shot, cropped tight so that the top line of her black dress is just visible, which forms a strong contrast with her dazzling white skin. Camera flashes

[116] Monk, op.cit.: 162.
[117] Spicer, 2004, op.cit.: 83.

flicker on and off the screen continually (the effect of each of which is a preternatural whiteness of face for the split-second that it lasts) and the camera itself is constantly in movement, adding a dynamic touch to the image, and creating a sense of bustle and energy. She looks down, takes a step forwards, and the image begins to dissolve into another: a red carpet photo call at which she is the starring attraction. The flashes continue, and there is a strong source of light off to the right of the screen, which she faces. Seen thus in profile we can see that she is dressed differently, and that her hairstyle has altered. The image begins to dissolve again, the camera flashes and the frenetic camera movements persist, but once more there is a different dress, different hair. An artificial camera sound is heard, the image freezes, transforms into a front cover of *Empire* magazine (complete with a headline that reads: "Great Scott!"), and recedes into the background (fig. 12, overleaf). The image dissolves again and the routine is repeated: new setting, new look. The scene carries on in this vein, and as it progresses we see Anna in virtually every guise of femininity one could care to think of, the 'chameleon-like' nature of which ability is never so obvious as when she is depicted in those images which themselves transform into the covers of magazines, since they truly show her to be a woman for all seasons. From the sassy Hollywood megastar on the cover of *Empire*, to the sweetly feminine 'girl's girl' on the cover of *Marie Claire*, to the confident and successful Stateswoman on the cover of *Newsweek*; Anna, it seems, can fulfil the requirements of any role that life asks of her.

Fig.11

Fig. 12

Comparing this sequence of images to something like the afore-mentioned wedding scene in *Four Weddings*, a number of differences are immediately apparent. Here there is no sense of a gradual enlightening/'enwhitening,' since Anna is very much *in* the light already, thanks to the flickering, stroboscopic-like lighting effect brought on by the constant firing of the paparazzi flashguns. It is no coincidence that there are so many 'light analogies' for fame in the English language (for instance, we speak of having one's 'name up in lights,' of being 'in the limelight,' and even 'stars' – another area in which Dyer's work can prove useful – *shine* with light from within): a point that this sequence makes loud and clear, since it illustrates the realities of fame that explain how such expressions originated in the first instance.[118] Moreover, in those images from the sequence wherein Anna is *not* subjected to this constant surveilling (and enlightening) gaze, the majority display an adherence to the afore-mentioned 'movie lighting' style: the implication being that the images have been drawn from the films in which she has starred.[119] The only exceptions to this rule are those images that show

[118] As well as being instrumental in the development of whiteness theory, Dyer has published works on many other aspects of representation. *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, was directed at explaining the functioning of the star system in Hollywood, within which a particular performer's meaning to the audience is a composite of all their past roles, publicity shots, reviews, interviews, public appearances, and any other forms of publicity, *plus* an added quality known as their 'star' quality. In other words, the star in greater than the sum of their parts, which for that reasons makes stardom insubstantial, or unreal: a point that *Notting Hill* explores throughout the film. See: Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (London: BFI/Macmillan, 1987).

[119] Having mentioned the gaze, it is worth mentioning here that the gaze is it is not explicitly gendered in this sequence as it is in the wedding scene from *Four Weddings*: although having also previously mentioned Laura Mulvey's seminal article *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, it suffices to say that

Anna between takes on film sets: in these movie lighting has not been employed, but in at least one shot the technologies upon which the style relies are explicitly referred to (the shot I have in mind shows her seated, in profile and in silhouette, with an enormous – yet unlit – spotlight to the left of the screen). This sense that Anna is constantly 'in the light' underplays the spiritual connotations of whiteness and white femininity, whilst the reference to her being associated with light (light technologies, that is) has a double effect in that it both recalls conventional representational strategies, and destabilises them (and their constructions: i.e. whiteness and white femininity) at the same time.

Added to this, the sense that Anna's image is constantly in flux (which, in an image obsessed world is tantamount to her *identity* being constantly in flux), is radically different from the fixed and unchanging image of the idealised white women about whom Dyer spoke of as the earliest examples of the type. I have already mentioned Lillian Gish, and Dyer refers also to Mary Pickford, both of whom were represented in such an unchanging way that even their growing older was resisted: a state of affairs that resulted in them being subjected to the variously extreme infantilising measures that have since become the stuff of Hollywood mythology.[120] With every new guise of femininity that Anna appears in, therefore, the notion of a single, essential model of white femininity seems that bit more insubstantial, that bit more unreal: likewise with Anna herself, for by the end of the sequence one may begin to wonder which, *if any* of the 'white female faces' that she presents is real, and which is pure performance.

Despite these differences, however, as an example of the way in which the white female is idealised in representation, this sequence is arguably without equal in contemporary British cinema. Much like Roberts herself, Anna is idealised out of all proportion, and in each and every one of her many feminine guises, the defining characteristics of whiteface are writ large. Never is a non-white face depicted, since the entire point of the sequence is the portrayal of a space within which the only face that possesses interest (the only face worth representing, in other words) is Anna's: the face of idealised white femininity, the face of stardom. Moreover, she always faces the light

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the notion that the cinema apparatus itself tends to construct (and assume) a gaze that is not only white but also male is not to be challenged lightly.

[120] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 127. Pickford in particular was forced to suffer a bizarre range of measures intended to maintain her girl-like appearance well into her twenties. She had her breasts bound, was made to stand in pits in the stage, and was even filmed using oversized sets and furniture, in an attempt to maintain her image as 'little Mary.' See: Foster, op.cit.: 99-101. Jennifer M. Bean, and Diane Negra, ed., *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema* (Durham NC.: Duke Universtiy Press, 2002). (****Note to self and RM: appropriate citation required for the specific section in which this discussion can be found).

(or rather, the light always faces her, for the same reason as above). The sequence also takes great pains to emphasise photography: the medium from which, as Dyer has commented, the cinema "borrowed" the technological and standard use parameters that have been utilised to 'assume, privilege and construct' whiteness ever since.[121] Dress is another aspect in which the presence of whiteface is discernible, since although most of the outfits in which she is depicted are dark in colour, in one shot Anna is pictured wearing as brilliantly white a hue as the bride Laura in the scene from *Four Weddings*, and the effect is every bit as efficient at imparting glow for Anna as it was in Laura's case. I would argue that this shot is especially significant, since not only does it linger on screen for fractionally longer than most others in the sequence, it is also the only shot of the sequence that is referenced at a later point in the film, as is the case when William is seen in the cinema watching the film from which we are to presume that the image has been taken (a virtual replica of Stanley Kubrick's classic *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), judging by appearances).[122] Since that scene bears an even greater resemblance to the one from *Four Weddings* in terms of its predominant colour theme and light qualities (Anna, dressed all in white and seen in almost entirely white surroundings, grows progressively brighter/whiter – fig. 13, overleaf – and the light from her enlightens William via a simple shot-reverse-shot sequence), I would suggest that this 'white shot' communicates the sequence's most overriding message, which is that Anna's diegetic on screen function is to signify idealised white femininity.[123] And finally, a word should be said about music, since the sequence is overplayed by Elvis Costello's *She*, a song that comes about as close to what Foster has described as whiteface's backdrop of "white music" as one would imagine is possible, given that as its title suggests, its scope is just as narrow as the sequence's.[124] Overall then, it would seem safe to declare that *Notting Hill*'s milieu is just as much one of whitespace as was the case with *Four Weddings*.

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[121] Dyer, 1997, op.cit.: 91.

[122] *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, Metro Goldwyn Mayer (MGM)/Polaris/Stanley Kubrick Productions, UK/USA, 1968). This shot is referenced at several points in the film, which leads me to believe that the image that it portrays is intended to stand for Anna's performances in their entirety.

[123] By Anna's 'diegetic onscreen function' I mean the function fulfilled by the roles that Anna (that is, the character played by Julia Roberts, the real life actress) performs in the fictional films that are portrayed within the actual film *Notting Hill*: a complicated layering of different registers of reality.

[124] Foster, op.cit.: 51. Foster describes the way in which a character's otherness is marked by the use of familiar musical tropes in the cinema, whereby a particular refrain will be heard whenever a 'different' character appears on screen. As she states: "a few bars suffice to introduce the comfort or threat of the other." Whiteness, in contrast, is the only identity to lack this "musical marking." Elvis Costello, 'She,' *Notting Hill: Music from the Motion Picture*, Polygram, 1999.

Fig. 13.

William's introduction, which follows immediately on from the sequence of shots that I have just been discussing, differs greatly from Anna's, for whereas she is presented as being in every respect exceptional (particularly with regard to both her renown and her whiteness), it is his *ordinariness* that the film goes out of its way to emphasise. Nevertheless, in case one should think that his performance is as a result any less indicative of whiteface, it pays to remember what whiteness theory has held as its mantra from the very beginning: that there is a great deal of power inherent in the white male's ability to define the normative.[125] I referred earlier to Foster's concept of the 'everywhiteman,' and stated that Grant's character in *Four Weddings* was representative of the type. This is all the more so with regard to William, since every aspect of Grant's performance in the role seems tailored to the portrayal of an individual who is just as normal as you or I (so long as like me, you also happen to be a white male, that is). Spicer has perhaps captured the essence (though not the racial significance) of the matter when he states:

[w]hereas *Four Weddings* caricatured the debonair gentleman amidst an archaic

[125] Virtually every theorist of whiteness has uttered some kind of statement that has proceeded along roughly these lines, but for the purposes of clarity, let us settle on one of the most straightforward examples, from the American theorist Sharon Willis. Discussing Quentin Tarantino's masterful *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), and specifically the memorable scene in which the gangster's all squabble over who gets to be Mr. Black, she comments on the contrast that this makes with white masculinity's meaning in the film. As she states: "[e]ven in a film that seeks to disarticulate meaning from appearance, white men figure as not meaning anything by themselves or to themselves or to anyone else. And what a privilege this is." See: Sharon Willis, *High Contrast: Race and Gender in Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 1997): 213. *Reservoir Dogs* (Quentin Tarantino, Live Entertainment/Dog Eat Dog Productions, US, 1992).

> Home Counties England, Grant's William Thacker, as [Notting Hill's] trailer insisted, is an 'ordinary bloke', a humdrum middle-class divorcee who leads a 'strange half-life' as he puts it in the opening voice-over, a narrative device that creates a strong identification between character and audience, especially as William is wittily self-deprecating about his problems. Whereas Charles gradually emerges as a figure of some depth rather than being merely amusing, William is at once offered as a sympathetic everyman, the quintessentially decent boy next door.[126]

It is interesting that Spicer should refer to the film's trailer in this instance, since in *Performing Whiteness*, Foster speaks of a related issue with recourse to the advertising campaign of another film: 2001's *Artificial Intelligence: AI*, directed by Steven Spielberg.[127] She explains that the film was marketed in such a way that its protagonist, David (an artificial boy, played by Haley Joel Osment), becomes marked as white, even though no explicit reference to his racial identity was made in any of the promotional materials. She refers specifically to an advertisement that appeared in the *New York Times*, which featured the following – un-illustrated – tagline:

> "David is 11 years old.
>
> He weighs 60 Pounds.
>
> He is 4 feet, 6 inches tall.
>
> He has brown hair.
>
> His love is real.
>
> But he is not."[128]

As Foster explains, David's whiteness is "denarrated" in this description, which, as she goes on to say, means that it is "not narrated, but assumed."[129] There is a similar process of white 'denarration' at work in the trailer for *Notting Hill*, although it should be noted, of course, that in a world in which racial visibility is an inescapable reality of the visual text, it functions as more of a secondary site of meaning-production than in

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[126] Spicer, 2004, op.cit.: 81. (Quoting his earlier discussion of the 'everyman' type in *Typical Men*; see: Spicer, 2001, 80-81, 186-8). In the interests of accuracy, I should point out that Spicer's reference to the trailer, which he says describes William as an 'ordinary bloke' could be a misquotation. In my own copy of the trailer, William is described as a "very ordinary boy" (in contrast to Anna, who is described as "no ordinary girl"), and I have been unable to ascertain if more than one version exists. That being the case, I shall assume this to have been a minor error on Spicer's part.

[127] *Artificial Intelligence: AI* (Steven Spielberg, Warner Brothers/Dreamworks SKG/Amblin Entertainment/Stanley Kubrick Productions, US, 2001).

[128] Foster, 2003, op.cit.: 21. (Quoting original promotional materials).

[129] Paraphrase, Foster, op.cit.: 19.

the un-illustrated ad for *AI*. Nevertheless, if one imagines listening to the trailer with one's eyes closed, it is clear how its portrayal of the central relationship between Anna and Will around the notion of ordinariness has racial import (he is described as just an "ordinary boy", whilst she is "no ordinary girl", though only - and this is the most important point – in respect of her star, and not her racial, status). As Foster states (in reference to another, female only context): [w]ithout even being told, we *know* she is a white woman because it is not our custom to mark white women as such, only non-white women get marked in our white-centric culture. But just in case we missed that nonmarking, we learn of this woman's success" (in her chosen course of action, that is).[130] Foster could almost have been speaking of *Notting Hill*'s trailer in this instance, for sure enough, it follows William and Anna's joint 'nonmarking' with news of *Anna's* success (in her career), since we then learn that she is "the most famous woman" (note that the narrator does not say *white* woman) "in the world." In short, both William and Anna are, in the trailer, 'denarrated' as being white, and whiteness is in turn 'denarrated' as being 'just' normal – 'just' human, in other words – in contrast, one assumes, with the abnormality of their Others.

Returning to William's introductory scene then, a similar logic can be identified as being at work here also, since even the slightest hint of his particularity is guarded against, to the extent that everything about both him and his life is deemphasised: that is, portrayed as being entirely unspectacular, entirely run of the mill. This is especially notable in the opening voice-over, which I have reproduced in part below:

> "[o]f course I'd seen [Anna's] films, and always thought that she was, well, fabulous, but, you know, a million, million miles from the world I live in. Er, which is here: Notting Hill, my favourite bit of London … And what's great is that lots of friends have ended up in this part of London … This is where I spend my days and years, in this small village in the middle of the city, in a house with a blue door, that my wife and I bought together before she left me for a man who looked exactly like

[130] Foster, op.cit.: 19. Foster is discussing an article about the recent rise of human egg donor services on the internet, 'Eggs For Sale,' by Rebecca Mead. The woman referred to is a donor, and Foster's comments refer to Mead's description of this woman, and to Mead's reasoning as to what has made her a successful donor. As Foster notes, although there is no explicit reference to this woman's racial identity, there is a sense in Mead's words which suggests that her opinion as to why this woman has made a successful donor is that it is *inevitable*, precisely because she is a "nice girl: she doesn't drink, she doesn't smoke, she doesn't take drugs, she's pretty and quick to laugh, and she has a lovely singing voice… she is fair and blue-eyed and has a good academic record." In other words, she is a superior donor because she is *white*. Foster, op.cit.: 19. Quoting: Rebecca Mead. 'Eggs For Sale,' *New Yorker*, 9th August, 1999: 56.

Harrison Ford."

In the sense that it reveals the multitude of fronts on which the war against particularity is waged, this dialogue, with its many ever-so-subtle allusions to normativity, is undoubtedly symptomatic of the whitespace representative strategy. Within just a few seconds of his appearing on screen, the viewer has learnt that whereas Anna's world is extraordinary, William's is quite the opposite; in other words: normal. They have learnt that he lives in Notting Hill, which although his favourite 'bit' of London, is still just one small – in fact, 'village' sized – part of a much larger and more significant whole. They have learnt that 'lots of friends' have ended up in the same area: doubtless a pleasant state of affairs, but hardly one that marks his life (although it is less a life than a 'half life,' a mere accumulation of 'days and years') as being in any way unique. They have learnt that his home, on the contrary to being his 'castle' (for like all the Curtis scripted films, *Notting Hill* plays with classic stereotypes of Englishness), inspires in him no great feelings of pride, and lacks any distinguishing features save that of a 'blue door.' And most importantly, they have learnt (by implication) that as far as his ex-wife is concerned, he is equally lacking in distinguishing features, unlike the Harrison Ford look-a-like for whom she has left him: a hyper-masculine rival if ever there was one. William, in other words, is a classic figure of masculine crisis, but one who has managed to retain a foothold on the upper rungs of the hegemonic scale, simply as a result of his non-particularity: which, to be more precise, means his whiteness.

To reiterate, Foster defines whiteface as a space "where class and ethnicity are homogenised, sterilised, and largely erased in motion pictures"; and with regards more specifically class, she states that "accents and marks of lower- or working-class origin must either be erased or seen as clearly other."[131] *Notting Hill* as a film provides evidence for both of these representative regimes: for instance, it is just as guilty of portraying an almost entirely 'whitewashed' vision of contemporary Britain as was *Four Weddings*. However, it is in respect of its representation of Spike (Rhys Ifans), who, like Grant's other working-class house-mate Scarlett, functions as a counter to William's 'everywhiteman,' reinforcing William's ordinariness by his *abnormality*, that the film really stands out as one in which the principles that Foster identifies as belonging to whiteface are a high diegetic priority. Throughout the film, Spike behaves

[131] Foster, op.cit.: 51.

and speaks in such a way that he could only ever be interpreted as entirely other to William. The only character who speaks in a regional accent, Spike, who actually delivers some of the film's most memorably funny lines ("wouldn't this be an opportune moment to…slip-her-one?" comes to mind), shares many of the characteristics of that most well established of British cinematic types – the "working class fool."[132] His very first appearance, for instance, in which he asks William's opinion as to which of his many silly-captioned t-shirts he should wear on a date (he settles on one that unbeknownst to William, is emblazoned with: 'Fancy a Fuck?' on the back), establishes him as a crude, but naïve character, uninitiated into the ways of the polite, middle-class, *white* society for which William stands representative.

Such specifics of dress are in fact one of the areas in which the film's stance on normality and abnormality becomes most visible, as is demonstrated by the wide gulf that separates Spike's and William's different styles of dress. As Spicer observes, William is dressed in "deliberately everyday clothing, nondescript shirts and trousers": the kind of clothing which, in other words, has been carefully selected so as to not arouse the viewer's attention.[133] Spike, on the other hand, is dressed in a series of outfits – ranging from the merely eccentric to the patently ridiculous – that are undoubtedly intended to have the *opposite* effect: never more so than when he is depicted wearing William's rather ancient looking scuba-diving gear (not to go scuba-diving in, I might add). The exchange that passes between the two characters in the scene in question, not to mention the shot-reverse shot sequence that situates them at entirely opposite ends of the spectrum of diegetic meaning (figs. 14 and 15, overleaf), sums up just how different the characters are, both in the sartorial, *and* the philosophical sense. Confronted with the incredible sight of Spike quite nonchalantly eating his breakfast whilst wearing the red and black rubber garb (complete with face mask and a cigarette packet tucked in a flap at the crotch for effect), William, to whom the camera then turns, reacts in the way that I suspect we all would; he simply asks: "[j]ust um…incidentally…er…why…are you wearing…that?" Spike's response: "I was rooting around in your things and I found this and I thought, cool!" reveals him to have as little regard for convention as he does for the privacy of others, since he sees

[132] For a full discussion of this type, some of the best examples of which can be witnessed in the careers of Sid Field, Norman Wisdom and Charlie Drake, see Spicer's *Typical Men*, and his chapter entitled 'Fools and Rogues': Spicer, 2003, op.cit.: 102-125. Incidentally, the chapter also contains a discussion of the "upper-class fool": a type that as he acknowledges in his later article, the character of Tom from *Four Weddings* (James Fleet) typifies to a tee. Spicer, 2004, op.cit.: 79.
[133] Spicer, 2004, op.cit.: 81.

the outfit as a perfectly legitimate one, whereas for William (as for most of us), that would clearly only be the case in a few *very* specific situations (such as when scuba-diving, or at a fancy dress party, for instance). Spike, therefore, is marked as a signifier of (class) difference, and it is our shared sense of bewilderment at, and non-identification with that difference, that promotes the spectator's identification with William, and the whiteface performance from which he is constructed.

Fig. 14

Fig. 15

Spike and William's relationship by no means constitutes the film's only "class problem" (Foster's term for the moment at which either class-passing, or exaggerated class 'othering' becomes necessary within whiteface performance), since William and

Anna's is, in some respects, defined along those lines also.[134] In this age of 'celebrity' infatuation, there is undoubtedly something to be said for the argument that the stars of stage and screen might constitute a seemingly privileged 'class' in the traditional sense. After all, the reverence in which celebrities are today held by the general public, not to mention the financial rewards associated with celebrity in all its forms, has engendered a situation in which the average man in the street (a category into which William ostensibly fits), were he to encounter even the most minor 'star,' may well perceive such a figure to be a 'class apart' from themselves. Of course, Anna is no minor star: she is the most famous (white) woman in the world, and so the same applies to William's first encounter with her, only to a far greater extent. It is for this reason that Curtis' comments on the film (as reported by Spicer) take on a whole new significance if considered in conjunction with those of Foster on the class-passing requirements of whiteface performance. He (Curtis) has described *Notting Hill* as a "concealed fairytale – the princess and the woodcutter as it were", and notes that his and the filmmakers' intentions were "to make it seem as if this sort of thing [i.e.: William and Anna's meeting, relationship, and eventual romantic union within the 'safe' structure of the white heterosexual couple and the nuclear family] might actually happen".[135] As Spicer observes, *Notting Hill* thereby creates a fantasy space: "a faux-carnival London, an urban village of little shops, street markets, tasteful but ailing restaurants and secluded gardens, a magical setting where unlikely romances can blossom."[136] What Spicer doesn't say here, however, is that the fantasy that is on offer in the film is not just one of 'love conquers all,' for it is at least as much one of celebrity, of being able to move within the same circles of fame and glamour as the world's biggest stars: which, if one can accept the above arguments for the equivalence of stardom and class privilege, is a fantasy of *class-passing*.

According to Foster, the opportunity to engage with such a space of fantasy and escapism, to enter for a while into "another imaginary world" and to leave "one's own life" behind, is chief among the cinema's appeals.[137] Precisely *what* of 'one's own life' is left behind is of course determined by the exact nature of both the film text, and the spectator, but a line from Ralph Ellison's classic novel *Invisible Man* (1967), which

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[134] Foster, op.cit.: 99.
[135] Curtis in the foreword to the script; reproduced in: Spicer, 2004, op.cit.: 81.
[136] Spicer, 2004, op.cit.: 82.
[137] Foster, op.cit.: 99. Quoting: Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing*: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship (London: Routledge, 1994): 116.

chronicles the experiences of its unnamed African American narrator – the eponymous 'invisible man' – as he struggles to carve out a space for his self-identity in a white-centric and politically turbulent 1940's America, gives some clue as to what that might be in the context of the white space milieu.[138] Commenting on a recent trip to the cinema, the narrator describes both the film that was showing at the time ("a picture of frontier life" in which the implicitly white and "outnumbered" settlers triumph over the perils of nature and natives alike), and it effects upon him as a viewing subject, the latter of which descriptions leaves little doubt about the kind of fantasy that the white space milieu is wont to provide. "I forgot myself", he recalls, "(although there was no one like me taking part in the adventures) and left the room in a *lighter* mood."[139] In other words, despite recognising that in racial terms he had nothing in common with those on screen, still he could not help but be drawn into a fantasy of *racial-passing*; for as Foster states: [f]antasy gives audiences a space in which to play with their own subjectivity, to explore their own fluid senses of selves, as they are performed and rehearsed across real and fictional constructs of whiteness."[140] When one enters into the imaginary world of white space, therefore, it is just as likely to be one's race, as one's class, that is left behind.

Returning to *Notting Hill* for the final time then, and more specifically to the exact nature of the fantasy that *it* provides, the above arguments indicate that a reassessment (or rather, a clarification) of my previously stated position (which was that the film offers a space in which the viewer can engage in a fantasy of class-passing) may be necessary, since this is by no means the only (nor perhaps even the *primary*) type of fantasy in which the viewer can, as Ellison's narrator says, 'forget themselves.' This is not to say, however, that in the case of certain elements of the film's narrative especially, class-passing is not involved. Reading Foster's text, for example, one gets the feeling that *had* she written about *Notting Hill* as I intimated earlier (in reference to the film's trailer), her assessment of William and Anna's relationship is likely to have echoed my own (which, as I have said, is that it depicts a fantasy of class-passing). Though conjecture, such a notion finds support in her comments that when the "spectre of class difference" is raised, it is most often "solved" and "erased" in precisely that fashion (i.e.: by the "uniting or marrying of two white figures from different classes,

[138] Ellison, op.cit.
[139] Ellison, op.cit.: 140. Emphasis is added.
[140] Foster, op.cit.: 99.

who can then *class pass* in society through marriage, elopement, or other plot contrivances"), since this is precisely the pattern of events that is adhered to not once, but twice over in the film.[141] The first case relates to William; the second, to the definitively working-class Spike, since it emerges in one of the final scenes that he and William's equally middle-class (albeit eccentric) sister Honey are engaged to be married – a fact that comes as much of a surprise to Spike as it does to the audience. Even Spike, who signifies otherness throughout, is thus brought safely within the fold of conventional, middle-class whiteness by the end of the film, which just goes to show how far *Notting Hill* is prepared to go to indulge the requirements of the whitespace milieu. It is this kind of plot development, entirely unexplained as it is, that ultimately reveals the true character of the fantasy that is on offer in the film, for if the viewer is being encouraged to leave anything behind as they enter *Notting Hill*'s fantasy space, it is on one level their class; but on another, far more meaningful level, it is their racial subjectivity. Be they 'white,' 'black,' or any of the other colours of the visible spectrum onto which we persist in attaching racial meaning (although such labels are entirely arbitrary, unrelated in every sense to what limited phenotypical variation *is* actually present among the world's different populations), *Notting Hill* takes its viewers on a journey into a white world: a fantasy space in which, simply by engaging with the film's narrative and identifying with its characters, they are able to render themselves a 'whiter shade of white.'

Before drawing to a close, I would like to spend a short while considering the next, and thus far last film in the Curtis canon, 2003's *Love Actually*, which due to its simultaneous manifestation of, and apparent questioning of, the principles of whiteface performance, perhaps gives some idea as to what the future might hold for whiteface performance in a changing Britain, *and* a changing British cinema.[142] As before, I will begin by looking at the opening scene, though not this time for clarity's sake alone, since it and several later scenes combine to really earn for *Love Actually* its designation as one of the 'three ages of Richard Curtis,' insofar as they mark the film out as being of a separate 'age' or 'order' when compared with its two predecessors, perhaps not the least of reasons why is that unlike them, *Love Actually* was not only written by Curtis, it was also directed by him.

As a film based around a whole range of different characters whose lives are all

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[141] Foster, op.cit.: 98.
[142] *Love Actually* (Richard Curtis, Universal Pictures/Working Title Films/DNA Films, UK/US, 2003).

interwoven in various ways (or else become interwoven as the film progresses), *Love Actually* has a great deal more 'establishing work' to do in its opening moments than either of its two predecessors, with their comparatively focused central narratives, had to cope with. Indeed, in a recent retrospective television interview about his (now numerous) film successes, Curtis commented that "when I got to *Love Actually*, I pretty much thought I knew the formula for a romantic comedy, so I wrote ten of them at once in the hope that I'd never have to write another."[143] The film's take on the traditional opening scene reflects this multi-stranded nature of its narrative, being that it is separated into 8 distinct episodes (the other two relationships are introduced later), each of which is designed to provide a brief introduction of one or more characters, along with a snapshot of how their lives stand at the beginning of the film. In doing this, *Love Actually* avoids what could so easily have been a bewildering situation, with the viewer being unsure as to who was who, and how each was connected to each, but only by operating in an even more condensed version of the 'visual shorthand' than that which is usual in such scenes, and by relying on every trick in the book in terms of 'establishing dialogue' that Curtis has to hand. All of which, I am happy to say, makes the task of analysing the film an easier one, in that it is forced to 'lay its cards on the table' – in the ideological sense – from the very beginning: and that includes its outlook on the twin issues of both gender *and* race.

The first of the eight episodes opens, as Hugh Grant's voiceover informs us, on the arrivals gate at Heathrow, and is comprised of two chief elements: a montage of shots depicting a series of joyful reunions between those arriving, and the friends, relatives, or lovers who have come to meet them; plus Grant's voiceover itself, a treatise on love which claims such scenes as proof of the fact that despite it being a troubled world, "love actually *is* all around." The phrase is a reference, of course, to the film's title, but is also a (thinly) veiled allusion to another of Curtis' films, since it is a play on 'Love is All Around', which is the title of the song by the British band, Wet Wet Wet, that overplays the end credits in *Four Weddings*.[144] Not for one moment,

[143] Curtis in interview in the *Four Weddings* episode of the new BBC series, *Film Connections*: 'Four Weddings', *Film Connections* (BBC One, The British Broadcasting Company Ltd., UK, 11/09/07).
[144] Wet, Wet, Wet, 'Love is all Around', from: *Four Weddings and a Funeral: the Original Motion Picture Soundtrack*, (London: Fontana, 1994). The song's UK release was timed to coincide with the film's, and fuelled by *its* success, it reached third in the overall rankings for the most weeks spent at number one, with a remarkable spell of 15 weeks at the top of the British singles charts (the record, incidentally, is held by Frankie Laine, whose song 'I Believe' managed 18 weeks in 1953). Needless to say, this makes the reference—for *Love Actually*'s British viewers at least—an easily recognisable one. And that is not all, for as is characteristic of Curtis's special form of wit, he decided to make art imitate

however, is one likely to confuse the ideological terrain in which *Love Actually* situates itself with that of *Four Weddings* (nor with that of *Notting Hill*, for that matter), for reasons that are obvious to behold even in this first short episode. Gone is the 'whitewashed' vision of contemporary Britain, and in its place is one that whilst still predominantly white in makeup, nevertheless corresponds far more closely to the actual racial composition of today's UK.[145] Gone also is the insularity, social, political, and geographical, of Home Counties England and 'village-like' Notting Hill: this is a world of global events, a post-9/11 world (Grant's voiceover makes explicit reference to "the twin towers" at one point), a world in which love's omnipresence, and thus the believability of the romantic narrative per se, needs justifying.

Although they return to the fore in the seventh, such differences are left aside in the next six episodes – especially insofar as they revert back to a wholly white perspective – since their purpose, I would suggest, is to establish the place that the white male is to occupy in this altered world, and to hint at that place being one of a subject-in-crisis.[146] One by one, they introduce a range of white male types, all of whom conform to the disenfranchised and beleaguered image that we have come to expect of pre- to post-millennial British cinema. From the ageing rock star Billy Mack (Bill Nighy), who is reduced to making music that even his loyal manager admits is "shit" (although "pure solid gold shit"); to the adoring husband whose own wife thinks him a "loser"; to the widower crushed and alone in his grief; to the geeky sandwich delivery boy whose chat-up lines fall on deaf ears; to the film industry body double whose sexual performance (albeit in the simulated sense), clearly fails to excite his attractive 'co-performer': the message is that the white male is finding it hard to adapt to the new environment in which he has found himself.

The seventh and penultimate episode is the most interesting of all, insofar as it both compounds this message, and as I have said, brings the issue of difference very much back to the fore. It is here that one can see just how much things have changed (and yet also stayed the same) in Curtis' cinematic world in the nine years since his first

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life with *Love Actually*, since a running joke operates throughout the film in the form of Bill Nighy's character Billy Mack (an ageing rock star), and his only marginally altered version of the song—'Christmas is All Around'—which is shown to drive the nation to distraction as it climbs the charts to become the Christmas number one by the end of the film. See the Official UK Charts Company website; URL: > http://www.theofficialcharts.com/stats-most-weeks-at-no1.php <, accessed 21/08/07.

[145] It should be noted, however, that hetero-centricity is as much of an issue here as in Curtis's two other films (barring Gareth and Matthew's relationship, that is).

[146] The ratio of men to women depicted in the six episodes is fairly equal, but the emphasis is undoubtedly placed on the male.

film hit, for it ensures that Love Actually begins with the same idealised vision of the Christian marriage ceremony (and the white male's potential exclusion from it) that kick-started proceedings in *Four Weddings*, only it places upon that vision an entirely different racial slant. As the glowing white bride (Keira Knightly) enters the already brightly lit Church, in a blaze of yet more light (fig. 16, overleaf), one could say that there are more similarities than differences between what can be seen here and what we have already encountered in the opening scene from *Four Weddings*, but that would be to ignore the racial statement that is so clearly being made in the former context. And for those who would say that racial equality can only ever be achieved by doing precisely that (i.e., by ignoring race), I would cite the following statement of Toni Morrison's, which she made in response to just such an approach in literary criticism. She states: "[t]the act of enforcing racelessness in literary discourse is itself a racial act. Pouring rhetorical acid on the fingers of a black hand may indeed destroy the prints, but not the hand."[147] So it is in this case, for one cannot simply wish race away in this episode, for it depicts something that in years gone by would have been hardly thinkable, and which even today is still not without controversy – namely: a mixed race marriage.

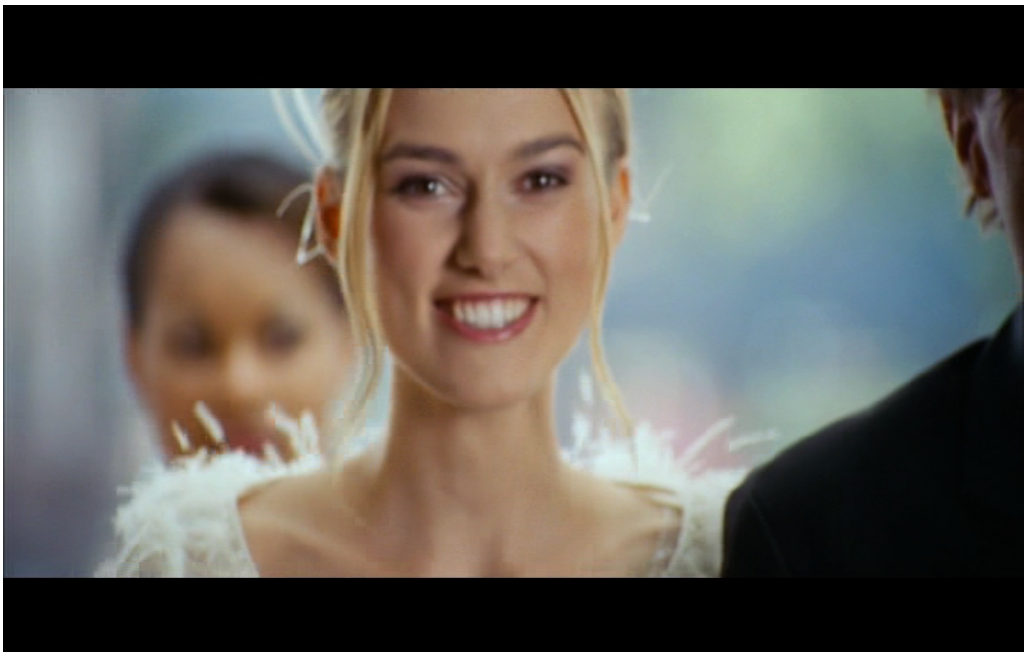

Fig. 16

To reiterate, not all of *Love Actually*'s ten romantic narratives are introduced in this opening sequence: two are left out, which suggests that a decision was made by Curtis at some point down the line as to which relationships would be included, and

[147] Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge (MASS), London: Harvard University Press, 1992): 46.

which would not. As I have said, numbers two to six present the film's interpretation as to then current status of the British white male, which fits with the generally masculinist perspective of Curtis' earlier films. Numbers one and seven on the other hand, present a rather 'different' side to Curtis' writerly priorities (with 'different' applying in every possible sense in this context), insofar as their inclusion demonstrates a particular keenness on Curtis' part to showcase *Love Actually*'s 'multicultural credentials' at the very earliest opportunity. Therefore, what began with the airport scene and Hugh Grant's optimism/tolerance-emphasising voiceover, is taken to the next level in the wedding episode, and, following the final episode in the sequence (depicting Grant's rise to office as the Nation's dream Prime Minster: like a revamped Tony Blair, only more handsome and with added, US-defying balls), to the level after that in its continuation. Here, virtually every aspect of the traditional Christian marriage scene (i.e. the same type of scene that we encountered in *Four Weddings*) is given what might be called a 'racial makeover;' or to borrow a phrase made famous by the Rolling Stones: is 'painted black.'[148] Not only are some of the guests black (in fact, around half of them are, with the remainder being – unsurprisingly – white), the ceremony's non-religious elements, which now form such a part of modern weddings, and which may involve anything from poetry readings, to film clips, to band performances, to the playing of favourite songs, are also drawn partly from black culture, in the shape of an all-black Gospel choir, accompanied by the (also black) singer/songwriter, Lynden David Hall.[149] Bearing in mind the dreary poetry reading that comprised this same aspect of the marriage ceremony in *Four Weddings*, not to mention that truly awful folk duo (both of which forge a connection with traditional English – read: white – culture), the presence of a former MOBO winning pop star in *Love Actually* is, to put it mildly, quite a change of message.[150] Then of course there is the groom himself, for here he is no idealised white male such as Angus was in *Four Weddings*, but a black male (Chiwetel Ejiofor): albeit one whose skin tone is especially light in hue (fig. 17, overleaf).[151] All in all, it is as if Curtis is determined not only to right the white-biasing

[148] The Rolling Stones, 'Paint it Black,' from *Aftermath* (London: Abco Records, 1966).
[149] Sadly, Hall was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma shortly before *Love Actually*'s UK release; he passed away in 2004.
[150] Hall won 'Best Newcomer' at the MOBO (Music of Black Origin) awards in 1998 for his album *Medicine for my Pain*. Lynden David Hall. *Medicine for my Pain* (London: Cooltempo, 1998). See: 'Previous Winners for 1998' page of the MOBO website; URL: <http://www.mobo.com/?page=036&t=noms&y=1998 < accessed 22/006/07.
[151] Comparing Chiwetel's screen shot above with, say, the shining and difference-signifying shot on page 47 of this chapter (the nameless black mourner in *Four Weddings*), one can see that Dyer was correct

tendencies of his earlier scripted films, but to make a statement as to their no longer being acceptable as well.

Fig.17

This message is repeated at two other points in the film, the most obvious of which is the scene in which Juliet (the afore-mentioned bride) goes to see the best man (Andrew Lincoln) pleading to see his video of the day, only to find that all of the black elements just discussed have been removed: just as they would have been had the scene adhered to the rules of whiteface in the first instance. However, it is at another moment that *Love Actually* makes its strongest statement on the whiteface representative strategy; namely: during the scene in which we revisit John and Judy's lives (the film industry body doubles, played by Martin Freeman and Joanna Page, respectively). As well as being a deft self-reflexive comment on the 'construted-ness' of the film medium in itself, this scene contains two specific images which together, symbolise the core of this chapter's arguments so effectively, that they offer the perfect note on which to end this chapter. For there is no doubt that the image of a black male in the role of mediator in the mock consummation of the white heterosexual relationship; juxtaposed with that of a white hand, holding a light meter, on a white face (figs. 18 and 19, overleaf), are the sum of this chapter's arguments, made manifest in visual form. Such images speak not only of the ever-present and diverse controlling influences that whiteface representations bring to bear, each of which, as Dyer said, have 'constructed, assumed

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when he attributed the white-privileging qualities of the cinema to design rather than necessity, since it shows that with a little effort on the cinematographer's part, the limitations of the inherited technology can be lessened in their severity, if not overcome entirely.

and privileged' whiteness from conception to utilization, but also of a possible alternative to whiteface – a kind of critical, self-reflexive whiteface – even if it is still some way in the future.

Fig.18

Fig.19

Two — Dinosaurs and Dodos, Miners and Steel-Men: The White Male Worker as Endangered Species in the British Post-Industrial Film

> "Coal is in your blood. You are an East Ender born and bred. You have the soul of a seafarer. Not surprisingly, these tropes are strongest in contexts where real and imagined communities of labor most closely interlock … It was almost inevitable that such communities should come to be widely regarded as forming a "race apart" from the rest of society."
> — Phil Cohen, 'Labouring under Whiteness.'[152]

> "We have become accustomed to thinking of 'real' men as those who labour in the iron, steel and coal industries, in shipbuilding, lumberjacking, pre-mechanised farming … [today, however] more people are employed making Indian curries than mining coal"
> — Anthony Clare, *On Men: Masculinity in Crisis*.[153]

In the previous chapter, it was shown that as far as one important group of films is concerned, the analytical framework of whiteface and whitespace, as defined by Gwendolyn Audrey Foster and supported by the work of Richard Dyer, applies well to the contemporary British cinema of white masculine crisis. As has been said before, this lesson, the essence of which is captured most completely in Foster's previously cited pronouncement that "most motion pictures are spaces of whiteface," is important not only for this chapter but also for the two subsequent chapters, and is best kept in mind from this point onwards.[154] Now though, I would like to look beyond the central notion of whitespace, and to shine the light of enquiry upon those who according to Foster, are forced out toward its margins. By this, I am referring to those who are made subject to the Othering and/or class passing machinations of whiteface representation, which of course includes as many different groups as there are perceived Others from that 'certain idea' of the white subject that was the focus in the last chapter. Yet of these groups, there is one in particular that interests us here – the white working class – since it more than any other is well supplied in numbers amongst the characters of contemporary British cinema, and in by no means every case is there evidence of such individuals being subjected to these kinds of limitations. On the contrary, in certain British film texts of the period 1994-2004, the viewing subject is presented with a vision

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[152] Phil Cohen, "Laboring under Whiteness," in *Displacing Whiteness*, ed. Ruth Frankenberg (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 1999): 247.
[153] Anthony Clare, *On Men: Masculinity in Crisis* (London: Arrow Books, 2001): 6-7.
[154] Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, *Performing Whiteness: Postmodern Re/Constructions in the Cinema* (Albany, NY: State U of New York P, 2003): 51.

of the nation in which members, and particularly male members of the white working class, have an important social role to play (perhaps increasingly important as time passes): a social role that adds to the already heavy burden of the ubiquitous white masculine crisis that is, of course, *also* present in these films. It is two such films (along with their recognisably, even resolutely working class characters) that we will be focusing upon in this chapter. Via their detailed analysis, we will cover areas such as class, gender, British history (of the socio-political variety), and British cinema, discussing how each relates to each (the issues and the films), and most importantly, to whiteness. As previously, the main body of the chapter is comprised of an extended close reading of the film texts, although unlike previously (and thus unlike chapters three and four also), this process starts on the very first page of the introduction, for as the films themselves are different to those discussed elsewhere in this thesis, so must our approach to them be different also.

2.1) Strength in Numbers: Masculine Crisis and the Myth of the White Male Worker

Although whiteness is an extremely important subject for this thesis, essentially this is a study about representations of British men whose masculinity is in crisis, and a scene that goes a long way to explaining at least one reason why British men came to be beset by crisis in the first instance, achieved this through just three simple elements. The first was a Sheffield Job Centre, the second was a group of unemployed ex-steel workers (all of whom happened to be white), and the third was a conversation between them concerning their current, and future, state as a species. The Job Centre scene in *The Full Monty* (Peter Cattaneo, 1997) acts like an outsiders' guide to masculine crisis in 1990's Britain, condensing a whole range of men's emotions, identifications and motivations-to-crisis, into a single two and a half minute segment of cinema.[155] It is a specialised guide, however, since the version of masculine crisis the scene portrays is case-specific, in that it relates to unemployed men only: former steelworkers in particular.[156] The scene begins with a wide-angle shot of the street outside, in which a white male is seen walking his dog from right to left of screen (a direction of movement

[155] *The Full Monty* (Peter Cattaneo, Redwave Films/Channel Four Films/Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, UK, 1997). There are actually several Job Centre scenes, the scene referred to here is the first of these.

[156] To steelworkers could be added all ex public sectors, or at least, those whose former roles would have caused them to be labelled and to self-identify as working class, since the two are not the same thing.

that often connotes 'backwardness' in film language: a fact perhaps related to his passing the centre's entrance without entering) whilst a tram (containing, perhaps, those on their way to gainful employment) speeds by in the opposite direction. As we move inside the centre, another male (non-white this time) takes centre frame: "I want those job applications filled out before I get back," he warns, teacher-fashion, before leaving the room. His resentful looking 'pupils,' the afore-mentioned ex-steel workers (or steel-men, as they are also known), then appear on screen, sat behind lines of desks, as if in an actual classroom. Their actions, as they produce playing cards, papers, or begin to chat, signal their utter disinterest in what has been asked of them, and their refusal to acknowledge the authority of the system in whose charge they now find themselves, as members of the unemployed.

The camera then centres on a group in the middle of the room, as Gaz (Robert Carlyle), brings the topic of discussion onto the events of the preceding evening/scene, during which both he and his young son had witnessed what to them was a deeply disturbing sight, and to the men listening is clearly no less a disturbing mental image. "I tell you, when women start pissing like us, that's it. We're finished Dave: extincto," he dolefully states. The offending vision (which caused an even bigger stir off-screen than on) is that of a woman relieving herself in a rather unconventional manner – standing up at a men's urinal - and the conversation quickly turns to matters of an anatomical nature. "I mean, how?" asks the puzzled Dave (Mark Addy), ascribing the female form with a sense of mystery and eschewing forty years of protests by feminists at the 'dark continent' notion; to which another replies: "genetic mutations, int' it – they're turning into us." As the camera switches perspectives to show the troubled expressions on the faces of each of those listening, Gaz delivers his final verdict: "Few years and men won't exist, 'cept in a zoo or some'it. Not needed no more are we? Obsolete. Dinosaurs. Yesterday's news."

As depressing as that might sound (if you are a man who places particular value upon your sex's supposedly 'unique' mode of urination, that is), the scene does not end there, although it does alter direction slightly. Gerald, who all this time has been sitting off to the side trying to do as asked amidst the distraction, suddenly attempts to bring the conversation to an end. "Button it you lot", he barks irritably, "some of us are trying to get a job", adding for good measure, "and it says 'No Smoking' in here", whilst pointing to a sign off-screen. The camera then cuts back to the first angle facing

Gaz and Dave, the former of whom (since Gerald's tirade had been directed at him in particular) sarcastically replies, amidst much laughter: "Ay, and it says 'Job Club' up there, and when was the last time you saw one of them fucking walk in? You forget Gerald, you're not our foreman anymore. You're just like the rest of us: scrap." Traditional concepts of class are thus sent the same way as those of gender in the previous exchange.

Here the scene alters course once again, as Dave (upon whose mind Gaz's earlier comments have obviously been preying) shares his rather less fatalistic train of thought. "Hang on though", he reasons, referring back to the urinating woman (or to be more precise, the male strip show that had been laid on for the sake of those inhabiting the newly redefined model of femininity for which she stands), "why were all them women in't working men's club in first place? Now then! Because of us: men." Undeterred by Gaz's objections that the strippers in question do not even qualify for the title (which, in Gaz's next comment, is put down to their being "poofs"), he continues: "How many lasses were there though?" To this, Gaz (who still fails to see the point) blankly responds "thousands," before going on to express his angry disbelief at what he calls the "degrading" show's £10 entrance fee, a move that plays directly into Dave's hands, since it enables him to express his argument in terms that these particular men (particularly poor, that is) are likely to find more persuasive than most: economic terms. "Right" begins Dave, about to deliver his own, arguably more persuasive interpretation: "times ten quid by a thousand, right, and you've got" (he pauses to think), "yeah well, a lot, a very lot." It is only here that Gaz finally realises that Dave, for all his poor grasp of mental arithmetic, has got a very cogent point: a point that by the end of the film has led both of them, and even the uptight Gerald (plus three others besides), to entirely redefine their masculine identities, which instead of being directed against the also redefined femininity of the women with whom they (in truth, very seldom) come into contact in the film, are shaped specifically to profit from it, and thus to regain, in a way, its mastery.

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As stated previously, this scene is one of several in Cattaneo's film that bears witness to a contemporary crisis in masculinity: something that did not go unmissed amongst members of the popular press and other cultural commentators at the time of *The Full Monty*'s release. (What is telling is that even though the film featured several non-white characters and contained a number of scenes in which the existence of racial

tension is plainly evident – more on which later – the spate of articles mentioned previously largely ignored the issue of race, tending instead to bewail the 'state of men' in more general terms).[157] However, it also displays a number of other features, which when taken together mark *The Full Monty* as belonging to a small but highly significant sub-category of films within contemporary British cinema, that in this thesis, I call the 'post-industrial' film. In one sense, these films are simply a part of the much larger trend in contemporary British cinema towards narratives involving masculine crisis: that much is obvious from the scene just described. Yet these films share a great deal more than just a predisposition to masculine crisis. Their subject matters are to all intents and purposes identical, as are the range of characters that populate their diegetic spaces, all of whom are from the same kinds of backgrounds, share the same kinds of concerns, and therefore live markedly similar lives. What is more, each of the films demonstrates an acute awareness of where fiction meets fact with regards to its characters and the events of its diegesis, and of precisely where it stands in relation to certain earlier moments of British cinema (most notably – but not exclusively – the films of the *first* British 'New Wave').[158] The list of representative texts is short, but includes some of the most successful and well loved films of recent British cinema. *Brassed Off* (Mark Herman, 1996), *Billy Elliot* (Stephen Daldry, 2000, not discussed here), and of course *The Full Monty*, are all post-industrial films, and as the name suggests, the group's defining feature is their attempt to represent the impact of what is commonly known as 'deindustrialisation' (i.e.: the shift from a production to a service led economy) on the white working-class male.[159]

The post-industrial film, therefore, has a very specific genealogy, all the marks

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[157] Many of these articles cited such things as the widening gulf between boy's and girl's exam results and the rising figures of male suicides as evidence of masculinity's increasingly threatened status, and saw *The Full Monty*'s emergence at this time and in this place as forming part of that pattern. The academe also has tended to focus on the subject of masculinity when dealing with this film; of the few texts that examine masculine crisis in British cinema, all reference *The Full Monty* as a landmark film. For the popular press see, in particular: Anthony Clare, "Idle, Sad and Baffled by Sex: What's Wrong with Men?" *Independent*, 14th Nov 1998. For academia see: Claire Monk, "Men in the 90's," in *British Cinema of the 90's*, ed. Robert Murphy (London: British Film Institute Publishing, 2000). Andrew Spicer, *Typical Men: The Representation of Masculinity in Popular British Cinema* (London, New York: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2001): 184-200. .

[158] By which I mean the 'New Wave' of British art cinema from the 1950's and 60's, specifically, films such as *Look Back in Anger* (Tony Richardson, 1959), *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (Karel Reisz, 1960), and *This Sporting Life* (Lindsay Anderson, 1963): in other words, the 'angry young man' films. (The relevance of these films to the post-industrial films is discussed in greater detail in section 2.3 of this chapter).

[159] *Brassed Off* (Mark Herman, FilmFour/Miramax/Prominent Pictures, UK, 1996). *Billy Elliot* (Stephen Daldry, Arts Council of England/BBC Films/Studio Canal/Tiger Aspect Productions.WT2 Productions, Working Title Films, UK/France, 2000).

of which are evidenced in the scene just outlined. The opening shot for example, or the similar one inside the centre in which the men appear uninterested in regaining employment, has its origin in the notion of the 'soft job': the idea that certain areas of employment are fit for 'real men,' whereas others – which makes for the majority of those available in a deindustrialised economy – are not. This in turn leads to the 'us and them' logic that permeates these films, discernible in this scene in the way in which there are two poles of existence represented: one housing the likes of the 'Othered' and slightly effeminate Job-Centre worker (and, of course, 'lasses'), the other housing the men themselves, among whom previous work-based class distinctions are now no longer valid. It is also worth pointing out that this sense of social demarcation mirrors the very real distinction that exists between the employed and the unemployed in terms of their respective lifestyles. The scene's Job Centre setting, as well as Gaz's reference to the scarceness of jobs, underlines this point, which is indication of the fact that the issue of unemployment is the main axis around which the film's exploration of masculine crisis turns. And on a different note, the nature of the lad's discussion of the scene in the gents' toilets suggests a subversion of 'the natural order,' not only in terms of gender-specific behaviours but also of gender-specific spaces, examples of the latter of which are of course the toilets, and in a larger sense, the working men's club itself.

However, what is most noticeable about this scene, and the film as a whole, is that it is shot through with a sense of fear, since there is no mistaking that the men see themselves as being under threat, not just as individuals but as a *species*. Moreover, it is not just in *The Full Monty* that this is the case, since this idea of extinction (the interpreting of issues such as unemployment and changes within gender – issues normally attributed with triggering a crisis in masculinity – as something more threatening still) is discernible in the other post-industrial films as well. It is not just a question of cynical nostalgia for the ways of old, a wishing to return to the days when men were men, women were women, and both knew their place (although it is partly that). The fear that runs through the post-industrial films has a *racial* flavour to it, manifested in this scene in the non-white body of the Job Centre worker, and in the white bodies of the men themselves, as well as in the character of their response to the threat or threats which, by their logic, face them. Theirs is very much a group response, a coming together to ward off some notion of a challenge from 'outside' their ranks, and it is in this idea of coming together, of joining forces with one's own kind for the

purposes of defeating a common enemy, that the racial dimension of the post-industrial films is located.[160]

An interesting side note to this is that the notion of an endangered working class was *expressly* 'coloured white' just recently, when a special season of programmes dedicated to this issue was screened on BBC Two. Shown in the second week of March, 2008, the season (or rather, its title: the 'White Season') left no doubt as to the racial basis of the 'danger' that Britain's working class population is supposedly facing at the present time. This was a point made even more explicitly, and in striking fashion, in the season's trailer.[161] It showed a man's face (a white man, and a true working class equivalent of the 'everywhiteman' figure whom we encountered in the previous chapter) gradually being written on by different hands and in different languages (the emphasis is on the word 'different' here, since each of the hands is Othered by its owner's skin colour or jewellery, and English accounts for only a small part of what is written), the colour of which writing, naturally, is black.[162] As this writing begins to overlap and to merge, so too does the man's face begin to merge with the black background, until his eyes, which stare continually at the camera with a look that is part resigned, part accusatory, are the only part of him that is still visible. As the hymn 'Jerusalem' rouses to its sentimental climax, the man closes his eyes, obscuring himself almost entirely, and we hear the question that formed the season's tagline, asked in a male's distinctly working class (and by implication, distinctly white) voice: "is white working class Britain becoming invisible?"

Quite why the BBC chose this subject, at this time, as a suitable target for their spending of viewers' licence monies is not our main concern, but what it does show is that this fear of white working class extinction affects real lives as well as fictional ones, and that it has anything but diminished in the years since *the Full Monty* was first released. The implicit message in the trailer is that the white working class are a besieged people, whose culture and opinions, like the man's face, are being 'written out' of the national story. This is very similar to what the men in the Job Centre believe is

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[160] In the case of the post-industrial films, precisely who it is that constitutes one's 'own kind' is rather more complicated than this statement implies, since is not just race that seems to determine this, as evidenced by *The Full Monty*'s allowance of a non-white member of its central group (about which I will say more later).

[161] At the time of writing, the trailer could still be seen via the special 'White season' pages of the BBC website, along with the programmes themselves. The pages also contained discussion boards: a sign, perhaps, that the BBC expected a strong response to the season. For the trailer see: URL: >http://www.bbc.co.uk/white/what.shtml <, accessed 15/03/08.

[162] Foster, op.cit.: 20. For more on the 'everywhiteman' figure, see the previous chapter.

happening to them, except that here the acknowledged determining factors are class and race, as opposed to masculinity. How, then, should we interpret this belief? Are such fears of 'invisibility' and 'extinction' justified, or is it simply that white working class people, men especially, accustomed as they are to racial privilege and the benefits to which it entitles them in terms of social status, are liable to cry 'foul play' the moment that they perceive that status as having been undermined or eroded? The answer, surprisingly, is 'yes' on both counts, and it is this seeming inconsistency that I would like to explore in the remainder of this introduction. First, we will look at why a measure of unease among working class white people is today not only justifiable, but entirely natural, particularly in the case of certain regions of the UK and certain types of occupation (or prior occupation, as is more accurate), which means focusing for a short while on a number of points relating to British political and economic history. Following this, we will move on to discuss several theorists whose work highlights the way in which race has tended to infect, or seep into, such feelings of unease and discontentment, so that where was once simply a class issue, suddenly there is also a racial issue.

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The central narrative driving force in the post-industrial films is a change in the conditions of production, hence the need to know something of what this entailed, who it affected, how it affected them, and most importantly, the names and individual contributions of its major players. In this last regard, it is Margaret Thatcher, Conservative Prime Minister from May 1979-November 1990 and staunch advocate of 'monetarism' (the imposing of strict controls on a nation's money supply: a concept based on the theories of American 'New Right' economists such as Milton Friedman), whose name is most significant. Undoubtedly, the 'Winter of Discontent' (1978-79) acted as the catalyst for Mrs. Thatcher's rise to power; almost daily strikes within the public sector caused the nation to lose all faith in the government of the day, and parliament to lose faith in its leader, James Callaghan. Having lost the resultant Commons vote of confidence, Callaghan had no choice but to call a General Election. Meanwhile, the voting public, the memories of the previous winter fresh in their minds, were hardly likely to vote for a repeat performance in the form of a continuation of Labour rule. Hence on the 3rd of May, 1979, the Conservative party, with Margaret Thatcher as its leader, won with a swing in votes so massive that it was not equalled until the more recent 'New Labour' victory of 1997. Thus began what many consider to

be the most destructive period in office of any Prime Minister in the history of British politics.[163]

The reason why this is relevant is because Thatcherite policy affected the UK production and manufacturing industries enormously, particularly those parts of it that were State-owned such as the coal-mining and steel industries, and because these were the principle areas of employment for white working class men at that time. (Of course, there is an even simpler reason why this is relevant also, which is that that the coal-mining and steel industries are diegetically central to the post-industrial films). Whilst it is true that the march of global capitalism was already beginning to take its toll on this area of UK business before Mrs. Thatcher's period in office had begun, and whilst it is also true that certain of the state-owned industries were experiencing financial difficulties long before any government 'meddling' (for instance, in 1983, it was reported that seventy-five per cent of coal-mines were running at a loss), even the most staunch supporter of Thatcherite policy would have to admit that the exact coincidence of Mrs. Thatcher's period in office with a massive decline in the UK production and manufacturing industries was not entirely down to chance.[164] The simple fact is that that in the last two to three decades, the face of the UK labour market has altered beyond recognition. As Andrew Rosen explicitly states: "[b]etween 1979 and 2000, the proportion of the British labour force employed in manufacturing fell from thirty-one per cent to seventeen per cent." Given that for eighteen of those twenty-one years, Britain had a Conservative government, and that for eleven of those, Margret Thatcher was the Prime Minister, to say that she had an effect on British labour history (and by extension, white working class men's lives) is something of an understatement.

Moreover, in the case of the state-owned industries her role is unequivocal, since not only did she have the *power* to affect serious changes, early on in her second term it appeared that she had the *will* to do so. A crucial factor in this was the miners' strike of 1984-85: arguably the largest scale challenge to her authority that Mrs. Thatcher faced during her time as Prime Minister, and an event that proved disastrous to the coal-mining industry, especially the miners themselves. When in March 1984, Ian

[163] In compiling this account, and that which follows, two sources in particular have been of great use to me. Much of what is said here is discussed in greater detail in the following titles: Anthony Seldon and Daniel Collings, *Britain under Thatcher* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2000). Andrew Rosen, *The Transformation of British Life 1950-2000* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003). For a discussion of the effects of Thatcherite policy on British cinema, see: Lester Friedman, ed., *Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism*, 2nd ed. (2006).

[164] This assessment of the coal-mining industry appeared in a 1983 Monopolies and Mergers Commission report. Seldon and Collings, ibid: 31.

McGregor, the newly appointed chairman of the National Coal Board (the NCB), announced that annual coal production was to be cut by four million tons and that consequently, 20,000 miners would lose their jobs, a strike was more or less inevitable.[165] What is more, the government must have known this to be case, because having learned from their experiences of the 1981 miners' strike (over which they had been forced to make a humiliating climb-down), they had put in place various measures prior to the strike that had stacked the odds for a successful resolution – for them, not the miners – heavily in their favour. This included stockpiling reserves of coal at power stations, as well as training and equipping special riot police to deal with the expected (and soon realised) picket-line violence.[166] The results of these measures meant that the strike did not come to an official end until nearly a year and half later: incredible given that many of the miners had been forced to survive on handouts for much of that time (again, owing to a government measure: a change in legislation which made the strike illegal, giving them the right to withdraw state benefits). What was worse was that from the miners' perspective, the strike ended with absolutely nothing to show to show for it, whereas for Mrs. Thatcher and her government, the strike represented an enormous success, mostly in that it sent out the message that trade union militancy would never again be allowed win out over government policy as it had in the dark days of the 1970's.

Needless to say, the significance of these events went far beyond the coal industry. As Rosen states, the miners' strike of 1984-85 was indeed the "last major disruption" of such trade union militancy, and provided Mrs. Thatcher with a green light to proceed with her plans to bring the public sector's house in order (which to her meant profit), one way or another.[167] To Mrs. Thatcher, the way forward was clear, being either privatisation, or closure, with an often blurred dividing line running between the two. For the coal industry, it was more a case of the latter, and by the time that she stepped down from office in late November of 1990, 94 out of 170 pits had been closed. Other national industries fared little better. Only relatively small public companies had been sold up until the time of the miner's strike (British Aerospace and Cable and Wireless, among others), and some of those only partially. However, with the sale of first Enterprise Oil (June), Jaguar (July), and finally, British Telecom (November), 1984

[165] Rosen, ibid. 60.
[166] Seldon and Collings, op.cit.: 31.
[167] Rosen, op.cit.: 61.

saw the "privatisation bandwagon", as Seldon and Collings have called it, rush fully into motion.[168] British Airways and Rolls Royce joined their industrial cousins, British Aerospace and Jaguar, in 1987. The British Airports Authority, along with British Steel – the industry that had first dared to challenge the Thatcher hegemony – were sold the following year.[169] And the most controversial sales of all, the utilities companies – water, gas and electricity – went ahead in 1986, '89 and '90, respectively. State ownership of the means of production: a concept that had been tolerated, if not openly supported by every Prime Minister since the Second World War, was by and large made a thing of the past.[170]

These sales and closures affected the lives of many thousands of workers, both in good ways and bad. Some workers will have kept their jobs, and might even have found themselves in a better position after privatisation than they had been before. Some will have lost their jobs and been glad to do so, either because they saw it as an opportunity to begin an eagerly awaited retirement, or because of an enticing redundancy package. Some will have had no problem gaining reemployment in an identical (or at least closely related) field of work. And some, inspired by the spirit of the age, might even have gone on to start their own businesses, and flourished. Yet for each of these cases there will have existed a corollary: a parallel body of workers for whom Mrs. Thatcher's relentless drive to privatise – or to "sell off the family silver" as some of her fiercest detractors accused – would have spelt disaster.[171] Ultimately, that was the especially cruel thing about Mrs. Thatcher's policy-making: it gave a helping hand to some (the already wealthy, the class-climber, the aspirant homeowner, or the business-person), whilst it persecuted others (the already poor, the working classes, state pensioners, and the unemployed). Either way, for those in the latter category, the knowledge that some sectors of the population were actually *prospering* under Thatcherite governmental control was doubtless a bitter pill to swallow.

Throughout her long period in office, the 'Thatcher effect' was a real and tangible force in everyday life, affecting every single inhabitant of the United Kingdom,

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[168] Seldon and Collings, op.cit.: 28.
[169] In January 1980, a pay dispute led to the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation issuing is members with a call to strike. Thirteen weeks later, workers finally returned to their jobs: it was the first demonstration of the unyielding stance that Mrs. Thatcher would stick to when dealing with strikes throughout her time as Prime Minister. Seldon and Collings, op.cit.: 11.
[170] Historically, this had been a condition of the Labour party's constitution, but in the spirit of the move to the centre that has characterised all of its policy-making since the mid 1990's onwards, it was significantly excised in the run up to the 1997 General Election. See: Rosen, op.cit.: 63.
[171] Seldon and Collings, op.cit.: 28.

regardless of their generation, in a myriad different ways.[172] Whether that meant good or bad news depended on a number of things, such as where in the country one happened to live, and where in the class system one happened to fit. If, once again, we take the coal mining industry as an example, the dramatic decline that occurred at Mrs. Thatcher's hands was by its very nature regional, for the simple fact that coal mines, being dependent upon their local geology, tended to be clustered together in certain parts of the UK (principally: Scotland, Wales and the north and south-west of England, with a few exceptions, such as the comparatively small-scale pits in Kent, found elsewhere). Moreover, very often, the towns and villages in which pits were located had grown up around the pits, having been formed as part of the larger shift of the population from rural to urban areas during the first great period of industrialisation, and served no purpose other than to house its workers, their families, and the supporting community. Thus, the pattern of closures that was initiated at Mrs. Thatcher's behest – but which has continued ever since – did not just destroy an industry: it rendered entire communities obsolete.

In that sense alone the effects of the closures spanned the generations, but this was all the more so since in coal mining communities, and in other communities similarly reliant upon a single large source of employment, there is often a very real sense that jobs are held 'in trust' for each successive generation.[173] Hence the removal of that employer affects not just the current generation of workers, but all future generations of workers also – a 'lose:lose' situation if ever one existed. What is more, since it is usually in the area of heavy industry that such situations arise (be it a coal mine, a steel mill, or a vehicle manufacturing plant, all industries that suffered major declines during the Thatcher years), the jobs, whilst they had been available, were predominantly manual in nature. This in turn meant that those out of work were, ironically, the working class: a manual occupation being the generally recognised prerequisite of said status, hence my saying above that Thatcherite policy was class-specific in its effects. What this leaves us with is a group of individuals with a great many things in common, from the communities in which they lived to the class

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[172] A case in point (albeit one that occurred some ten years before she had gained office) is the 'milk snatcher' episode, when Mrs. Thatcher's name became known even to schoolchildren as the person to blame for the cancelling of free milk to the over sevens. See the BBC internet piece: 'The Truth About Thatcher Thatcher Milk Snatcher,' URL: >http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_depth/uk/2000/uk_confidential/1095121.stm<, accessed 15/3/08.

[173] In the context of mining communities, this fact is acknowledged on the NUM's website. See: URL< http://www.num.org.uk/?p=history&c=num&h=13< accessed 12/11/07.

positions with which they identified, all of whom saw themselves as victimised by the government of the day: none more so than those who had been, or were still, employees of the drastically shaken nationalised industries. This, if anything, was Margaret Thatcher's legacy.

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There are two distinct problems with using the events outlined above to explain the kinds of white working class male fears that we were discussing earlier. The first is simply to do with their time-scale, in that Mrs. Thatcher was six years out of office by the time that the first of the post-industrial films, *Brassed Off*, was released in 1996 (twelve years in the case of the 'White Season' trailer). In a comment that highlights this problem (and also provides support for my placing these films in a separate sub-category), Geoff Brown refers first to *The Full Monty*, and then to *Brassed Off*, in his article 'British Film Culture in the 90's' (2000), asking us to "imagine the extra sharpness [*The Full Monty*] might have acquired had Simon Beaufoy's script been made in the 1980's, when the industrial north was truly in the grip of recession."[174] He goes on to add: "[i]n the late 90's, the film seemed almost a period piece, like Mark Herman's *Brassed Off*." My response to this is that Brown seems to be missing an important point here, which is that the post-industrial films are not merely about the threat or the reality of unemployment (one of several symptoms of recession), since they are also concerned with what alternative there is to unemployment in an economy from which the British manufacturing and production industries had been almost entirely excised. In other words, the economic foundations for the situation that triggers both the masculine crises and the white male worker's fears of extinction in these films were laid long before their moment of release: they were laid during the era of Thatcherism, hence both *Brassed Off* and *Billy Elliot* being set during that very period. Ultimately, the *Guardian* journalist Jeremy Hardy hit the nail on the head with regards the continuing influence of Mrs. Thatcher's time as Prime Minster when he commented in 2006: "[t]he only caveat I would sound when people remember the joy of her departure is that her legacy is still with us."[175]

The second problem with interpreting the events of 1979-1990 as explanation

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[174] Geoff Brown, "Something for Everyone: British Film Culture in the 1990's," in *British Cinema of the 90's*, ed. Robert Murphy (London: BFI Publishing, 2000): 33.
[175] Jeremy Hardy, "The Bitter End," *Guardian*, 25th Nov 2000. Quoted in: David Sterritt, "Low Hopes: Mike Leigh Meets Margaret Thatcher," in *Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism*, ed. Lester D. Friedman (London, New York: Wallflower Press, 2006): 321.

for later white working class male fears of extinction was hinted at earlier in my suggestion that the perceived erosion of white male privilege may in fact play just as big a part in those fears as any feelings of betrayal and/or disenfranchisement still harboured by white working class men in connection with their past (and arguably continuing) treatment at the hands of 'the State.' Part of the issue here is that as stated previously, the effects of that treatment were in many cases felt amongst all sectors of the working class population, white women and non-white persons of either sex included, meaning that these groups would have equal claim to such feelings. What is more, when speaking of job losses, invariably it was non-white workers who were the first to be targeted, and who (in percentage terms at least) were hit the hardest. For example, almost half of all Asian industrial workers around middle-age had lost their jobs by the middle of the 1980's: a percentage far higher than that experienced by their white counterparts.[176] Certainly, in terms of overall numbers, it was white working class men who were the worst affected by the huge changes in the British labour market that together came to be known as 'deindustrialisation': a fact that Rosen illustrates with recourse to figures relating to the membership of trade unions. He states: "[i]n the wake of deindustrialisation there has been a long-term decline in the proportion of union members who are white and male and work in heavy industry."[177] Yet this is by no means the whole story, and does not explain why the feelings of disenfranchisement and fears of extinction which, if we are to believe the post-industrial films (and the trailer for the BBC's White season) have arisen as a result of these events, should have taken on a racial dimension.

So, the Thatcher era left an emotionally wounded white male working class in its wake, a group of men who felt trodden down by their government and by society, discarded, ignored, suddenly out of place in a country that had changed around them with shocking rapidity. It also left other groups, whose suffering was equal, if not greater than that of this main group, different only with regards to their being female, or non-white. Why, then, did these groups not join forces; why this impulse to club together with one's 'own kind' to face this perceived threat from outside, this impulse so reminiscent of the closing of ranks that occurs within race? The short answer is that where *Brassed Off* and *The Full Monty* are concerned, these groups *do* join forces in a sense, since the close-knit unit that occupies centre stage in these films shows itself to

[176] Paraphrase. Rosen, op.cit.: 93.
[177] Rosen, op.cit.: 57.

be capable of accommodating a white woman in the former film and a black man in the latter, thus opening up the possibility that said unit is formed on some other basis than sex or race. Whether this can actually be called progressive is another matter, however, given the preponderance of casual sexism and racism in both of these films. Crucially, a person being accommodated in a group through a relaxing of its boundaries is a far cry from their being incontestably due admittance by dint of 'right.' Suffice to say, therefore, a full explanation of what precisely is going on here is still some way distant.

Fortunately, there are a number of theorists whose work helps to shed light on this matter, and in the final stage of this introduction I would like to look at each of them in turn, focusing on how and why their work is relevant to this chapter, before taking up where we left off with our analysis of the post-industrial films in the next section.

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Although a book that deals exclusively with the American case, David R. Roediger's groundbreaking *Wages of Whiteness* (1991) is a good place to start when attempting to understand how race comes to enter into (and to intersect with) male working class identity.[178] An in-depth analysis of how the American white working class came into being both as a concept and as a source of identities, Roediger's book charts a complex journey from the first European settlers to a proud but underprivileged working class to whom a sense of whiteness was of the most profound psychological importance (and still is in modern times). He begins by explaining that this linking of race and class occurred only during the nineteenth century in the United States, belying the apparent naturalness that the term 'white worker' has subsequently acquired in the U.S. popular consciousness.[179] As Roediger states: "[the words white and worker] became paired during a time in which the United States, whose citizens were taught by their revolutionary victory and republican ideology to expect both political and economic independence, became a nation in which, by 1860, roughly half the nonslave labor force was dependent on wage labor and subject to new forms of capitalist labor discipline."[180] Whiteness, argues Roediger, thus came to act as a form of psychological 'wage': a way of compensating for this loss of independence, vitally important insofar as it served to distinguish the free working whites, the 'wage slaves,' from the *real*

[178] David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991).
[179] Roediger, op.cit.: 20.
[180] Roediger, op.cit.: 20.

slaves, the blacks.

Roediger also gives an account of how the Irish in particular came late to whiteness, a fascinating story of how the boundaries of race can at different times and in different circumstances shift to accommodate those not previously granted admittance.[181] Citing pre-Civil War descriptions such as "*low-browed* and *savage*, *grovelling* and *bestial*, *lazy* and *wild*, *simian* and *sensual*", he first demonstrates the way in which the Irish were mocked and despised in early U.S. society, pointing out the "striking similarity" of their treatment with that of blacks at the time, before retracing the "two-sided process" by which the 'Irish worker' became simply, a 'white worker'.[182] This, he argues, involved both the Irish workers and the larger American population, for as the Irish began to be more widely accepted as whites, they themselves began to insist on their own whiteness, and on white racial superiority to boot.[183] Although Roediger attributes their success in being finally recognised as whites to their political power as voters, that the Irish were as keen to uphold the notion of white superiority as those to whom their appeal was addressed is not likely to have harmed their case. Each of these notions (i.e.: that the very idea of a 'worker' in the United States' popular consciousness is understood as meaning 'white' also, and that the boundaries of whiteness in the US have tended to shift as the need arises) is central to this chapter's line of argument, and serves to remind us that one's racial, class, and gender identities are but intersecting parts of the same complex article.

Another text that deals exclusively with the American case is Fred Pfeil's challenging, and often controversial book about white heterosexual masculinity, *White Guys: Studies in Postmodern Domination and Difference* (1995).[184] Using the tools of close textual analysis, Pfeil explores changing representations of white straight masculinity in 80's and 90's US popular culture, in a bid to challenge the assumption that, as he states: "there is but one white straight masculinity, and it is bad".[185] More importantly, he provides a (relatively) modern day update on the situation outlined by Roediger, in that he analyses – through its popular cultural representations – white working class identity in its then current state. His discussion of the "male rampage film" (his own term, characterised by films such as *Lethal Weapon* (1987) and *Lethal*

[181] This is a subject that is discussed in much greater detail in chapter three.
[182] Roediger, op.cit.: 133.
[183] Roediger, op.cit.: 137.
[184] Fred Pfeil, *White Guys: Studies in Postmodern Domination and Difference* (London/New York: Verso, 1995).
[185] Pfeil, op. cit.: ix.

Weapon 2 (1989), *Die Hard* (1988) and *Die Hard 2* (1990), as well as the earliest of the many 'Rambo' films, *First Blood* (1982)) is particularly illuminating.[186] Pfeil maintains that these films, each of which follows a near identical formula (a white male protagonist defies 'the system' in order to battle some giant conspiracy, eventually triumphing against overwhelming odds, landing the girl in the process) offers a remodelled version of what is a familiar dramatic figure in literature and cinema alike: the common man, meaning the common *white* man. Discussing *First Blood*, he explains that alongside the figure of "the "wild man" (the white man gone native/wild) Sylvester Stallone's character Rambo contains traces of:

> "yet another old, and quintessentially American, popular narrative of white masculinity: that of the heroically strong and honest worker who fights the greedy, corrupt, and powerful for the benefit of all, and whose concealed elite or aristocratic origins … function as a sign of his allegorical status as a figure of the rightful American republic, in whose special virtues we (white males) all presumably may share."[187]

Whilst the attraction of the male rampage films for white male spectators is obvious in light of this relationship, Pfeil argues that to fully understand the special allure of these films we must also take into account the economic context in which they were both produced and received. The image that he conjures for us, of a nation ripped apart by economic change (a product of the shift from "Fordism" to "post-Fordism"), a nation with deepening divisions between races, between genders, as well as between and within classes, sounds really not much different to the situation that prevailed in the UK during the Thatcher years, and in the years following.[188] And of course, there *is* little difference between these two situations, since the effects of deindustrialisation were felt not just in the US but in Britain too, and also around the world (or throughout the West at least). Principle among these effects was what Pfeil, quoting the Marxist theorist Edward Soja, refers to as the "squeeze in the middle of the labor market", which in the US entailed a massive increase in the number of low-paying jobs available in the service sector (jobs for which women and non-white people were deemed to be particularly suitable: hence the divide in the classes), and a very small increase in the

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[186] *Lethal Weapon* (Richard Donner, Silver Pictures/Warner Brothers Pictures, US, 1987). *Lethal Weapon 2* (Richard Donner, Silver Pictures, Warner Brothers Pictures, US, 1989). *Die Hard* (John McTiernan, Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation/ Gordon Company/Silver Pictures, US, 1988). *Die Hard 2* (Rennie Harlin, Gordon Company/Silver Pictures/Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, US, 1990). *First Blood* (aka *Rambo: First Blood*) (Ted Kotcheff, Anabasis N. V. Elcajo Productions, US, 1982).
[187] Pfeil, op.cit.: 5.
[188] Pfeil, op.cit.: 6-7.

number of skilled technical or professional jobs available in what was left of the production industry.[189] Coupled with the increased presence in the workplace of women in professional positions or positions of authority, plus the "feminization" of work itself in this new 'service led' national economy, the male rampage films thus offered to their white male spectators a powerful site of identifications through their portrayal of a realm in which men could still succeed by being men, and in which the frustrations arising from this 'brave new world' could be worked out through violence.[190] As Pfeil states, the white male protagonists of the post-industrial films:

> "evoke with various admixtures of pride, embarrassment, and wistfulness, the resonance of skills discounted or dismissed in the new late capitalist Processed world of LA, within films that go on to reassert the ongoing value, even necessity, of such skills and savvy in the struggle against international criminal-commercial enterprise".[191]

Despite Pfeil's repeated insistences as to the 'uniquely American' nature of this situation, the significance of his arguments, especially that relating to the figure of the 'honest white worker' who symbolises the nation and that relating to the male rampage film as apologia for the continuing value of traditional white masculinity, can hardly be overstated in the context of our discussion of the post-industrial films and their mixed handling of class and race.

The next theorist that I would like to discuss is the recently deceased Ruth Frankenberg (another whose work dealt predominantly with the American case, although she herself was British), yet before doing so I would like to briefly mention Anthony Clare, who, you will recall, authored the sentence that forms one of this chapter's epigraphs. Clare's reference to 'real' men, a concept embodied by "those who labour in the iron, steel and coal industries, in shipbuilding, lumberjacking, pre-mechanised farming", but who, in today's service led economy, are themselves something of an 'endangered species,' seems to gain an extra significance in light of

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[189] The phrase is from Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies* (London and New York: Verso, 1989). Quoted n Pfeil, op.cit.: 6-7.

[190] Pfeil cites Donna Haraway on the subject of the 'feminisation' of work; his selected passage is repeated below. Haraway states: "[w]ork is being refined as both literally female and feminized, whether performed by men or women. To be feminized means to be made extremely vulnerable, able to be disassembled, reassembled, exploited as a reserve labour force; seen less as workers than as servers; subjected to time arrangements on and off the paid job that makes a mockery of a limited work day; leading an existence that always borders on being obscene, out of place, and reducible to sex." Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto of Cyborgs: Science Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980's," *Socialist Review* 80 (1985). Quoted in Pfeil, op.cit.: 27-28.

[191] Pfeil, op.cit.: 28.

Pfeil's comments.[192] It is easy to see how, in the wake of deindustrialisation, such figures might come to be valued especially highly among ordinary white men in the same way that the protagonists of the male rampage films are valued, as well as the psychological damage that might be caused by the 'endangerment' of such figures, or worse, by their disappearance. Moreover, it is equally easy to see how the miners, the steelworkers, those who actually labour in such 'hardcore' professions, either consciously or unconsciously, might come to identify with and to rely on their own myth, and the psychological damage that might then be caused by the loss of the very jobs by which they define themselves. The relevance of this to our discussion of the post-industrial films, again, hardly requires comment.

Returning as promised to Ruth Frankenberg, then, the first thing to be noted is that like most theorists of whiteness referred to during the course of this thesis, she considered whiteness to be a construction rather than an innate quality, a learnt process as opposed to a given, plural as opposed to singular in nature. (By now you will hopefully be aware that this is a viewpoint that I share). Although she was the author of several works on whiteness, the text that most clearly demonstrates this position is her introduction to an anthology of essays that appeared in the same year that *The Full Monty* was released, 1997. *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*, is a key text for this chapter, principally because of the essay by Phil Cohen (to which we will turn in a moment), but also because of Frankenberg's contribution, 'Local Whitenesses, Localizing Whiteness.'[193] A concise summary of whiteness theory's main areas, Frankenberg's text performs all the normal duties of an introduction, situating the anthology's essays in the larger cultural and theoretical context, yet also stands as an astute analysis of whiteness in late twentieth century society in its own right. The piece also represented something of a departure for Frankenberg, in that it gave the first indication that she was moving away from her earlier focus on whiteness as an 'unmarked category,' as outlined in her 1993 book, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*.[194] Citing some of the names by which non-white people have historically referred to white people – "ghost", "gringo", "honky", and various others – Frankenberg (in *Displacing*) argued

[192] Clare, op.cit.: 6.
[193] Ruth Frankenberg, ed., *Displacing Whiteness* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 1997). Introduction on pages 1-33.
[194] Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (London, New York: Routledge, 1993).

that whiteness is frequently 'marked,' only not by white people themselves, as is evidenced by their self-given names: "American, English, British, man, woman."[195] What this shows is not only that the notion of whiteness as an unmarked norm is, as Frankenberg states, "a mirage, or at least a phenomenon that is delimited in time and space", but also that such names as this latter variety speak as much of race as they do of gender or of nationality.[196] And of course, as I have been attempting to prove, phrases such as 'the common working man,' and perhaps titles such as 'miner' and 'steel-man' also, are racialised in precisely the same way, which helps to explain why those who label themselves such might view the experience of crisis through the lens of race, as the 'endangered species' notion implies.[197]

Phil Cohen's essay 'Laboring under Whiteness' (from which one of the previous chapter's epigraphs was taken), takes these arguments and advances them significantly.[198] One of the longest of the collection's essays, Cohen's is perhaps the most interesting also, certainly as far as this chapter and its analysis of the post-industrial films is concerned. Based in ethnography, the essay takes into account sociocultural effects, as well as the effects of certain ways of thinking about and responding to one's racial Others, in analysing a specific type of working class whiteness, a type that is implicitly male, and implicitly British. In fact, to the extent that he places particular emphasis on the differences *within* whiteness, as well as the differences and the similarities between races, Cohen's approach is, to quote Frankenberg's summary, all about "specification."[199] He begins by chronicling the emergence of an "alternative whiteness", that is to say, whiteness as it is conceived within certain forms of whiteness theory. This 'alternative whiteness', as Cohen states:

> "is self-conscious and critical, not taken for granted or disavowed; it is the visible focus of open conflict and debate, not the silent support of an invisible consensus of power; for those to whom it is primarily addressed it is a source of guilt and anxiety rather than of comfort or pride; above all, it issues from a perspective that privileges a certain black experience of racism and insists that racism is primarily a white, not a black problem."[200]

According to Cohen, this 'new whiteness' originated in the United States

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[195] Frankenberg, ibid.: 4.
[196] Frankenberg, op.cit.: 7.
[197] Frankenberg does actually use the term "endangered race" to describe white men at one point, though it is in reference to white patriot and militia movements in the US and not to the casualties of deindustrialisation. Nevertheless, her use of that particular term is worth noting.
[198] Cohen, op.cit.
[199] Frankenberg, op.cit.: 29.
[200] Cohen, op.cit.: 244.

around the time of the civil rights movements of the 1960's and has since been added to by those working in the fields of feminism and cultural theory both here and in the US. It rests, he argues, on two major assumptions, one that views white supremacy as the paradigmatic form of racism, and another that views whiteness as essentially the same racist construct on both sides of the Atlantic, and has resulted in arguments for the building of what Cohen refers to as "a transatlantic wall against racism."[201] Rather than aligning himself with such an approach, however, Cohen argues that it has certain inadequacies, especially when it comes to explaining whiteness in its localised forms (i.e.: those that are regionally and culturally specific). Whiteness, in his view, is neither an "essentialized biological medium of racial superiority" that manifests itself in a simplistic British/American will to dominate; nor is it merely a "social or discursive construct" with no reality outside language (the 'new whiteness' approach implies both such things according to Cohen); it is a contingent and many stranded construction that is lived through in ways that are distinct to time and place.[202] As Cohen states: "the issue is significant precisely because it puts in question the distinction between color and culture as mutually exclusive terms of discrimination."[203]

The 'alternative to the alternative' that Cohen sets about delineating at this point in his analysis has greatly influenced my own line of thinking with respect to the post-industrial films. Alongside Cohen's own ethnographic research, it is based in Lacanian and post-Kleinian psychoanalysis, and in the work of the renowned French sociologist Pierre Bordieu, resulting in a model for the formation of the British white working class that is much more historically grounded than that discussed in the paragraph above (plus more in line with those of the other theorists discussed previously). His arguments are highly complex and thus difficult to summarise, but very roughly, we can say that from the perspective of psychoanalysis, he takes the idea that race is an embodied site of shared origins (though one that is discursively placed); and from Bourdieu, he takes the idea of the "habitus", meaning (again very roughly) an acquired mindset, or a set of perceptions and policies of behaviour (especially within the workplace); and fuses the two, in an attempt to explain why certain types of labour are so frequently linked to certain types of identity.[204] As Cohen himself puts it:

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[201] Cohen, op.cit.: 245.
[202] Cohen, op.cit.: 245-6.
[203] Cohen, op.cit.: 246.
[204] Cohen, op.cit.: 246-7. For Bourdieu's definition of the term 'habitus,' see: Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Reproduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

> "[from psychoanalysis] we get the idea of race as an empty category or degree zero of representation, an "X marks the spot" that is not Y, a difference placed outside language and inside the body by a discursive operation that is necessarily subject to unconscious disavowal and repetition. This "spot marks what is otherwise somatized as unrepresentable about difference and its desire, and makes it available as a shared place of origins and destiny … The next step in the argument tries to suggest why these "natural" symbolisms of race are so often anchored to particular attributes or divisions of labour, here considered in its broadest sense as *any practice that works on given matter to reconfigure its value and meaning*."[205]

The final clause in this passage is the most significant one, both for Cohen's line of argument and that of this chapter, since it is here that the concept of the 'habitus' enters the discussion. Highly complex in its own right, the habitus is a key concept for sociology, giving access to a frame of reference that enables sociologists to explain the way in which human beings, as cultural subjects, internalise certain precepts of their cultures and surrounding social structures – those of the workplace being just one example – through the dynamics of group membership. As stated, Cohen cites Bourdieu, specifically his book *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993), as having developed the term habitus (not strictly true, although Bourdieu did broaden the concept) and adheres closely to the way in which Bourdieu relates its meaning[206] As Boudieu's editor Randal Johnson says in his introduction to the book, for Bourdieu: "[o]ne of the central concerns is the role of culture in the reproduction of social structures, or the way in which unequal power relations, unrecognised as such and thus accepted as legitimate, are embedded in the systems of classification used to describe and discuss everyday life."[207] For Cohen too, the habitus is about the distribution of power, about a sense of group belonging, and a sense of what (or more often, *who*) does not belong. It enters our lives as a "set of customary rules, rituals and invented traditions"; it engenders "imagined communities of labor that both govern particular workplace cultures and shape the way different kinds of work are evaluated in society as a whole."[208] For every habitus, then (and each mode of production has one, Cohen maintains), certain specifics of identity – race, class, gender, even age – become linked to distinct positions within the social division of labour.[209] Thus, with the concept of

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[205] Cohen, op.cit.: 246. Emphasis is added.
[206] In his introduction to the book, Bourdieu's editor Randal Johnson describes the concept's origins in the following terms: "a concept borrowed from Scholastic philosophy but also used, in a different but not totally unrelated sense, by thinkers such as Hegel, Husserl and Mauss." From Bourdieu, op.cit.: 5.
[207] From: Bourdieu, op.cit.: 5.
[208] Cohen, op.cit.: 246-7.
[209] Paraphrase, Cohen, op.cit.: 247.

the habitus, we can explain how particular types of work (and those who perform them) become both masculinised and racialised.

This is not the extent of Cohen's arguments, however, for we have not yet explained what it is that compels people to internalise the 'rules, rituals and traditions' of the habitus in the first instance. What, as Cohen asks, "gives the habitus its binding power?"[210] The answer is fairly simple, in that it has to do with the realities of our working lives in the capitalist system of labour, or rather, with their unwelcome dehumanising effects. The greater the extent of those effects, the further removed we as workers become from our labour's purpose, the more we desire an alternative. The habitus is that alternative. Its appeal, as Cohen explains, is that it acts like "a kind of second womb that will give birth to a new man or woman, the embodiment of living labor freed once and for all from the dread hand of alienation."[211] He continues:

> "[s]uch fantasies of self-sufficient combination … are articulated through myths of origin and entitlement which support purified definitions of the work habitus in terms of "species-specific" qualities of labor … To belong to this body is to acquire a special pedigree, a principle of consanguinity, which is often transmuted into an almost mystical sense of ownership and control over the means of self-production … There is the sense of an almost congenital link between origins and destinies, providing a template for what we might call a *protoracialization of labor power*."[212]

Needless to say, these comments about 'species-specific qualities of labor' and the 'protoracialization of labor power' are hugely significant in the context of this chapter. Not only does Cohen explain in this passage what it is that binds workers to the habitus (and bound to it they are, for as the post-industrial films show, its effects can outlast even the working environment itself), in discussing the situation that it gives rise to, he describes a situation that closely mirrors the one that we observed in the scene from *The Full Monty* back in the first few pages of this chapter. Moreover, to the extent that the strength of the habitus' pull and the alienating effects of individual labour positions are interrelated, it follows that the *most* alienating jobs, the jobs wherein the abstraction between one's value as a source of labour potential and the actual conditions and duties of one's work is the least, the more inclined one will be towards the kind of 'myths of origin' of which Cohen speaks. In other words, working class jobs: hard, physical jobs; jobs like that of the coal miner, or of the steel-man; these types of jobs are far more likely to have attached to them such myths and notions of 'species' than any other.

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[210] Cohen, op.cit.: 247.
[211] Cohen, op.cit.: 247.
[212] Cohen, op.cit.: 247-8. Emphasis is added.

Cohen does in fact state outright that certain occupations, coal mining among them, are a special case with regards to matters of the habitus, as witnessed by the quotation that forms the second of this chapter's epigraphs. A slightly fuller version of that quotation reads as follows:

> "[c]oal is in your blood. You are an East Ender born and bred. You have the soul of a seafarer. Not surprisingly, these tropes are strongest in contexts where real and imagined communities of labor interlock, where children follow parents into the same occupational habitus, and growing up is essentially an apprenticeship into a fixed inheritance … It was almost inevitable that such communities should come to be widely regarded as forming a "race apart" from the rest of society."[213]

Coal mining villages, cities such as Sheffield that are "built on" a single industry (as the 'film within a film' that appears at the opening of *The Full Monty* declares): these are the communities of which Cohen is speaking here, and it is their inhabitants, or at least, those among them who are employed within the 'foundation' industries directly (meaning, predominantly, white men), who he claims have come to be recognised as a 'race unto themselves.' A derogatory characterisation, this; but only in part, for as Cohen goes on to explain, such men, emboldened by the sense of pride instilled in them by the afore-mentioned 'myths of origin,' have turned this notion to their advantage, giving rise to a counterclaim that situates their labour as the "backbone of the nation," and themselves as a "chosen species" (which is the same trope masculinised).[214] The members of this "ideal body-of labor" are not long able to bask in their own glory, however, for according to Cohen, they are very soon joined by an opposing group: an "anti-body of labor" made up of those who do not fit the habitus' mould and who threaten its stability from within and without, since it is they who come to represent the very alienating effects that the habitus has covered over, and which the former group have disavowed.[215] Be they the wrong race, gender, or perhaps the wrong class, the members of this group, in Cohen's words, thus constitute "labor's Other body", or 'labor's "other scene.""[216]

The final stage in Cohen's arguments further complicates matters, since it is at this moment that he brings in the elements of psychoanalysis that were mentioned previously. Beginning with the idea of race as 'empty category or degree zero of representation' and setting it alongside the above arguments regarding race as labour's

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[213] Cohen, op.cit.: 248.
[214] Cohen, op.cit.: 248.
[215] Paraphrase. Cohen, op.cit.: 248.
[216] Cohen, op.cit.: 248.

'other scene,' Cohen argues that two distinct body images for the (white) worker are thereby created. The first body desires for nothing "because it is endlessly productive or entirely self-regenerating in and through its racial genealogy"; this body is not broken down by the harsh conditions of the working environment through which it moves, since "the toils of labor [are transformed] into a "species-specific" site of redemption."[217] The second body is more realistic: its desires are not met but are "disciplined, disfigured, and ultimately destroyed in the process of its own daily reproduction through labor"; its whiteness does not transform its toils into a source of pride, but rather, "adds only a further sense of insult to the injuries this body sustains in its intercourse with the real world.[218] (It is this reality that is subsequently projected onto the members of the anti-body of labour). This leads to a situation whereby a labour process can be both despised and cherished simultaneously: despised because it gives the lie to the idea of self-sufficiency, cherished because what is really dependence is reconfigured to mean ownership.[219] (One's son is not born into an environment with limited employment opportunities; he is born into a masculinised 'community of labour': the difference is subtle, yet significant).

This very nearly brings us to the end of our journey through British labour history and the various theories relating to the figure of the white male worker, yet before we recommence our (now long overdue) analysis of the post-industrial films, there is one last point of Cohen's that I would like to discuss, which is in many ways his most significant in the context of this chapter. I am referring to the section wherein he broaches the subject of how in the case of many white workers, deindustrialisation has changed the relationship to the work habitus, since it has utterly transformed the notion of labour itself. As Cohen notes, the rationale outlined in the previous few pages has its basis in a labour market in which the notion of hard, physically punishing jobs – jobs from which it was possible to take a sense of pride in being tough enough to 'stick it' – was still a reality for the vast majority of white working class men.[220] Now, of course, such jobs are no longer the rule but the exception; now a more likely physical indicator of one's employability than one's toughness is whether or not one's face fits the corporate image.[221] In such an environment, race and gender have become both more

[217] Cohen, op.cit.: 250, and paraphrase.
[218] Cohen, op.cit.: 251.
[219] Paraphrase. Cohen, op.cit.: 251.
[220] Paraphrase. Cohen, op.cit.: 253.
[221] Paraphrase. Cohen, op.cit.: 253.

and less important: more important insofar as one's outward appearance might be what seals or breaks the deal at the recruitment stage, less important insofar as these things no longer bear any relation to our ability to function in the workplace.[222] This leaves a situation that has varying effects, depending on where exactly in the hierarchy of employment they are viewed from. As Cohen states:

> "[t]hose who have the credentials to win the "clean" white collar jobs consign the dirty jobs and those who do them to the dustbins of history … Meanwhile, among the rank and file who cannot gain entry to the new work habitus, certain types of traditionally white manual work take on a hyperinflationary value, not so much because of skill or wage level, but because they require or permit the public display of masculinities that have otherwise become redundant and dysfunctional … [These workers] are celebrated for being ruggedly individualistic *and* for restoring a lost sense of male fraternity and pride – and not just to the working class but to the nation as a whole. They have indeed been invented as the standard bearers of a new white race."[223]

I need only mention that Cohen includes both coal miners and steel-men as representatives of this "new ideal body-of-labor" to explain why these comments are highly relevant to our analysis of the post-industrial films, and why the almost complete loss of these industries in the UK is significant for reasons far exceeding the economic.[224]

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Thus we come to end of our discussion of the theorists whose work has helped to shape the readings of the white working class men that appear in the analysis which follows. Together with the sketched outline of British labour history provided earlier, this work paints a picture of a group of men whose identity is bound up in notions of race, class and gender, and in the conditions and thought processes associated with particular working environments. These are men who occupy a unique position with regard to the effects of deindustrialisation, and whose fate represents that of masculinity, whiteness and the nation as one. It is these men who populate the post-industrial films, and who we shall reencounter in the next section.

2.2) The Post-industrial Film: Race, Class and Gender in *Brassed Off* and *The Full Monty*

Since this chapter's principle argument is that race plays an important part in shaping the various crises that the protagonists of the post-industrial films are shown to

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[222] Paraphrase. Cohen, op.cit.: 254.
[223] Cohen, op.cit.: 254.
[224] Cohen, op.cit.: 254.

experience, it makes sense to begin this section in discussing those afore-mentioned scenes in which the 'racial dimension' is not so much inferred by the reader as explicitly spelt out in the text. One such scene is the one that opens *Brassed Off*: Mark Herman's powerful, if sentimental film, about a group of coal miners cum amateur musicians, set during the time of the pit closures of the 1990's.

Like most film openings, this one begins with a black screen, only here the blackness is not incidental, since this is the blackness of the coal mine: a place of darkness, dirt and danger, yet also (a fact that becomes clear as the scene progresses), a place of enjoyable camaraderie, a place in which firm bonds of friendship are forged. Following the sound of a works whistle, a group of miners (visible only by the circles of white light from their head-lamps) parade across the screen, seemingly marching in time to the (non-diegetic) brass band music that starts up at the very moment of their entry onto the scene. As the sounds of drilling, laughter, and indistinct banter join this music to form a chorus, we see flashes of smiling faces, plus glimpses of the dirty, hard and physically punishing work in which they toil. This mood of contentment amid conditions of great hardship continues throughout the scene, as does that of togetherness, signified by their identical dress, and by the symbol of the band, its members individual units, yet working/playing together in the name of the collective product: music/coal. A continuity cut takes us to the interior of the mine shine elevator, the band of happy miners huddled inside, their time in the darkness over, their time in the light about to begin (fig. 1, overleaf). Hurtling upwards towards the surface, towards the realm of people, the realm of society, it is an obvious metaphor for birth; or rebirth, since these men undertake this journey, from the primordial blackness to the light of culture, every day of their working lives.

This metaphor is strengthened as the men emerge, single file, from the pit shaft, each handing his 'tally' to the banksman (a kind of identity tag, yet also a token of his labour) before striding out to confront the world. Switching to an extreme long shot showing the pit workings, including the giant winding tower (an iconic image that like the church steeple, provides a constant reminder to the surrounding community of its roots in industry), we see the men walking towards the camera; their togetherness, formerly enforced by the cramped surroundings, maintained, even though now they are out in the open. Another continuity cut takes us to the interior of the locker-room, and it

Fig.1

is here that we finally get our first good look at these men, can finally appreciate that they bear the mark of their subterranean labours in their dirt-rimed faces (fig. 2, overleaf). As we move into the communal showers, however, we see that this mark is both partial and, above all, temporary, since it extends only to their exposed parts, and through collective effort (each helping his neighbour), is easily removed. Emerging from the showers, the men have undergone another sort of rebirth: here they have been cleansed, both literally and figuratively. Outside in the car-park, the day's dirt and their uniforms removed, the group (now smaller, composed only of the principle characters) embodies that most powerful symbol of social belonging: 'normalcy.'

The scene does not end here (the group all squeeze into the same car, encounter the community's women fighting against the threat of pit closures, their conversation turns to women in general, and a question virtually identical to that discussed earlier in relation to *The Full Monty* is asked about the nature of women's anatomy), but its main point, or points, have at this stage already been made. As stated, this scene carries a quite obvious racial message, and no time is wasted before the process of communicating this message to the spectator begins. Thinking back to the previous chapter, we learnt that associations between whiteness and light – especially particular kinds of light – have a long history in moving image representation. We learnt that white people are often represented in such a way as to suggest that

Fig.2

they have a special affinity with light that is itself white, and that such light symbolises "vigour, cleanliness, piety and enterprise", to quote the words of Richard Dyer.[225] We also learnt that white people (women mostly, but in certain situations, also men) might even be suggested to be the source of that light, that it might be suggested to come from within them. The image of miner's head-lamps shining out from the darkness takes on a whole other level of meaning in relation to these lessons, its message arguably all the more permanent because it is the very first image that the spectator sees upon entering the film's milieu. Theirs really is the 'light of civilisation' that penetrates a realm of non-culture (a common rationalising metaphor for the European annexation of foreign lands), since this is a realm that is quite literally unearthly, and they are its only socialised subjects. They are, moreover, the source of this light in a way, for since it issues from their head-lamps, it moves when they move (yet they do not hold it, or move it consciously), and for each man, there is a pool of white, virtuous light. Just within the first few seconds, then, we are left in no doubt as to whom these men are, and what it is that they stand for in terms of race.

This message is powerfully reinforced as the scene progresses, yet only after it has come through a period of questioning. Watching the scene, specifically the section where the men enter the locker-room and showers, I am reminded of a comment by

[225] Richard Dyer, *White* (London: New York, 1997): 71.

Cohen on a subject that was mentioned a few pages previously: labour's "dual body."[226] Discussing the process by which particular meanings become attached to particular jobs (and those who do them), Cohen explains that how a job is viewed, both from the inside and from the outside looking in, might not have anything to do with its actual circumstances (the skills required, the conditions endured, the wages earned), but could be a result of *which* of these two bodies is being envisaged. Thus, as Cohen states: "unskilled manual work can be simultaneously whitened by being made to signify a proletarian ethnicity or macho sexuality and blackened by association with dirt."[227] This notion, along with the one mentioned earlier about the labelling of certain white working class communities as a 'race apart,' is quite clearly relevant to the scene just described; but the question is, which of labour's two bodies do the men represent?

Considering the effort that up until this point in the scene has gone into portraying the men as a tough but contented band of workers, able to move through an alien world – and more importantly, to come back from it into the world of the social – the emphasis that is placed on their togetherness, their tight-knit nature, I would suggest that theirs is the 'ideal body-of labour,' not its anti-body. This does not mean, however, that the 'race apart' notion is ignored entirely, only that their particularity is portrayed as a 'special pedigree,' as something to be proud of, not ashamed. Indeed, I would argue that with regards to their working selves, the film emphasises their difference to the men outside the environment of the coal-mine, and that their working selves are held up as an example of Cohen's ideal white masculine type that we discussed earlier.[228] (Of course, this being contemporary British cinema, their *non-working selves* are portrayed as being crisis-ridden in much the same way as every other class of white male). From this perspective, then, the dirt on their skins does not 'blacken' them, but rather, serves only to highlight those parts of them to which it does not extend, whitening the whole further in the process. The image that meets us as the camera moves through the communal showers is a sea of white flesh (or "reddish pink", as Dyer noted), and might have prompted the comment that Lord Milner made when he saw some of his troops washing in a stream during the Battle of the Somme (quoted by Cohen); that is: "I never knew the working classes had such white skins."[229] Moreover,

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[226] Cohen, op.cit.: 251.
[227] Cohen, op.cit.: 251.
[228] This point applies to the post-industrial films as a group, though in the case of *The Full Monty*, it is a past working life that defines the type.
[229] Cohen, op.cit. 256.

although Cohen notes in relation to this comment that the possibility that this whiteness may 'wash off' has, at times, been considered real, that is most certainly not what is implied in this scene. Here, the pejorative sense of the 'race apart' notion is acknowledged and dismissed in the same moment, and from beneath the black mark of their ennobling labour, these men emerge, resplendent in their whiteness.

A similar scene to the one just described appears at, or in fact, before the opening of *The Full Monty*. The 'film within a film' sequence (mentioned briefly in the previous section) also serves to map the work habitus and the white male's place within it, yet it goes one step further than the scene from *Brassed Off* in its suggestion that the product (in this case steel) is of vital importance to the larger community.[230] The statement that Sheffield is (or more appropriately, was) 'built on the steel industry,' is true in every sense, which makes it all the more tragic that the work habitus portrayed in the sequence is one that belongs to the past. The switch from this past Sheffield to the Sheffield of the present is a switch from labour to non-labour, the empty space of the steel-works on which the film proper opens, symbolising the void that the steel industry's demise has left in the local employment market. What is more, as in the first few moments of *Brassed Off*, the spectator is made immediately aware, through the device of this 'film within a film' sequence, which sector of the population this switch has affected the most. An image that typifies those that make up the sequence is the one that appears towards the end, showing a man standing at a complex set of controls, looking intently forward, an expression of concentration on his face (fig. 3, overleaf). It is an image of a man who is in 'complete control,' in both senses of that phrase. It is also an image of white masculinity; the macho symbolism of the control panel, its phallic levers firmly grasped by the controlling and possessing hands of the white male, stand for his mastery of the work habitus, and of the world outside. Moreover, the harsh side lighting (most likely the result of the steel production process itself), coupled with the nature and the age of the film stock, has had the effect of heightening contrast in the image, leaving an almost monotone effect (dark surroundings, the man's face and hands glowing with light), and having learned about such effects in the previous chapter, it may well be that this was intentional. "Twenty years later" (years that have seen the Thatcher era come and go) it is a quite different image of white masculinity that we are

[230] Significantly, the sequence was not shot footage; it was taken from sections of *Sheffield on the Move*, an actual 'community branding' film from the early seventies. *Sheffield on the Move* (Coulthard Productions, UK, 1972).

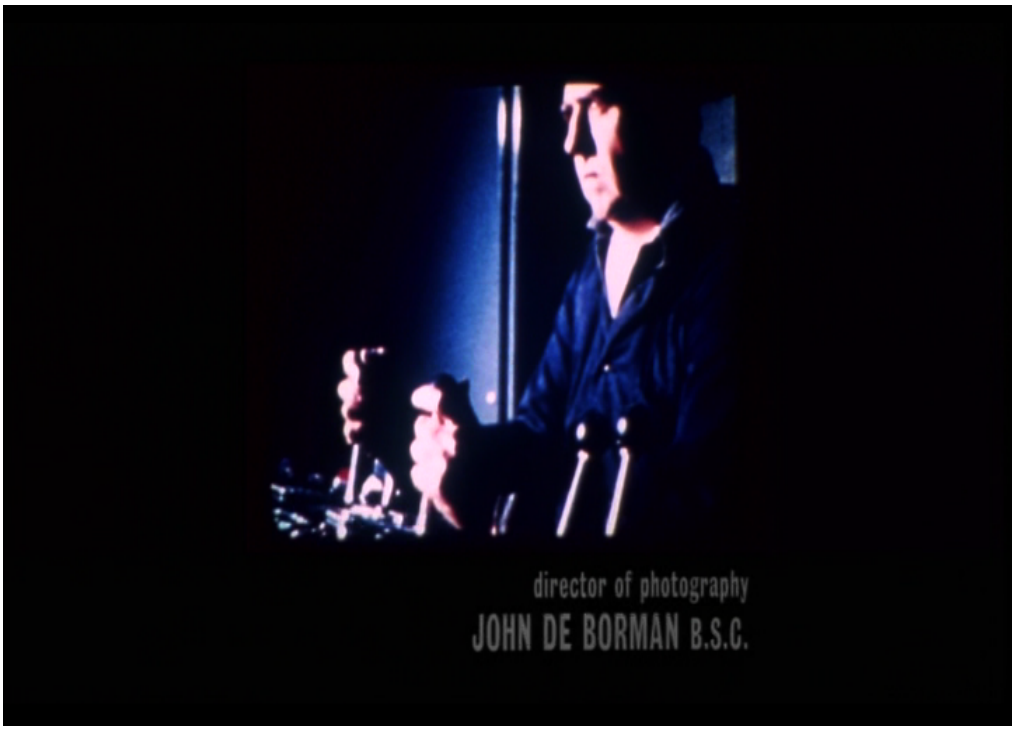

Fig. 3

presented with in the following scene. Personified by Dave, Gaz, and Gaz's son Nathan (William Snape), this white male is ineffectual, is lacking a place in the work habitus, and has gone from the master of his environment, to its victim.

As clearly as this progression (or *re*gression) spells the endangerment or the extinction of the white male worker as a species, a later scene from the same film has it beaten hands down in this respect. Both the imagery and the dialogue of this scene combine to state that the problems of working class unemployment and the attendant masculine crisis have causes that do not exclude the racial. The scene opens on Dave regarding himself un-admiringly in the bathroom mirror, his shirt hitched-up to reveal a less than Adonis-like torso, his hands clasping his ample belly, subjecting it to the occasional squeeze (fig. 4, overleaf). His wife, Jean (Lesley Sharp), is sitting up in bed, reading, in their adjoining bedroom; the door between is open.

Dave: "I say, Jean?"
Jean: "Yep?"
Dave: "Ever been out wi' a black bloke, like?"
Jean: "You know I haven't, Dave."
Dave: "But, if you were on't lookout for a new fella, right, if you were, just saying, would you think about it?"
Jean: "What's got into you?"
Dave: "No, would you though?"
(He moves to the doorway and looks enquiringly at Jean)
Jean: "I might do, yeah. Is that alright?"
Dave: "So it's true then."

Fig. 4

(He goes back into the bathroom)
Jean: "Bloody had enough of this *(to herself)*; what's true?"
Dave: "What they say about black blokes, that they've got great bodies and that."
Jean: "Some of em, yeah. And?"
Dave: "Nothing"
(Dave gets into bed. After a few moments, Jean begins to kiss his shoulder; she is attempting to initiate sex).
Dave: "Jeannie *(he stops her)*, I'm all in. It's amazing how tiring it is doing nowt you know."

This scene, with its implied association between male unemployment and impotence, or loss of libido at least, also carries a powerful racial message. Here, the white male is portrayed as being wracked with anxiety and body image issues; Dave is a man ill at ease in the situation in which circumstance has landed him. What is more, he is fixated with an exaggerated (and deeply racist) image of black masculinity, of black male potency, and seeks to find assurance from his wife of what he already believes to be true: that she harbours a secret and passionate desire for the black male that is far stronger than any desire that she has ever felt for him. These are issues that are discussed in detail in the following two chapters, but for the present moment, it suffices to say that such notions are a fantasy, but a common fantasy, and that they represent the fear of white racial extinction in its most direct and ugly form: the racist fear of interracial breeding and the resultant 'dilution' of the white race.

There is no such scene in *Brassed Off*, but as our earlier discussion highlighted, this film is every bit as concerned with race as *The Full Monty*, and as the scene we are about to discuss shows, the notion that the white male worker is (or very nearly is) an 'endangered species,' as this chapter's title suggests, is very much alive here also. The scene in question occurs at around fifty minutes into the film, and centres on Phil (Stephen Tomkinson), the character pictured on page 29. By this point in the narrative he has fallen on hard times financially (explicitly stated to be an after-effect of the miner's strike of 1984, supposedly 10 years prior to the time when the film is set) and has resorted to 'moonlighting' as a children's entertainer in a bid to clear his debts with the local loan shark. The scene joins him on a gig at a large, well appointed family home, its interior a far cry from that of his own (a contrast that shortly after is increased when all his furniture is repossessed and his wife leaves him, taking his children with her), and obviously in an entirely different area than any we have seen so far (not to mention one that is far more affluent). The first we see of Phil (or rather, of "Mr Chuckles") is as he bursts into the room, wearing a clown outfit, to meet his audience of expectant children. Complete with painted face, stick-on nose, hooped trousers and oversize shoes, he could hardly look more different to how he appeared when we first saw him; this is not the image of that ideal white masculine type of which we spoke earlier, but the image of a broken and desperate man. His act is, to say the very least, not well practised (every one of his magic tricks goes wrong), and when over, the lady of the house escorts him to the door; she is well dressed, overtly middle class and displaying an expression of ill-disguised disapproval. "This isn't your main job is it?" asks the woman, handing him what appears to be a ten pound note: the implication being that this is a cheap price for a man's dignity (fig. 5, overleaf). "I'm a miner" he replies, taking the note. "*A miner*?" she exclaims, her incredulity obvious. Phil holds the note between them, looks at it dejectedly, and replies: "You remember 'em love: dinosaurs, dodos, miners."

Very much like in his main job, Phil has crossed into another world in this scene, the gulf in terms of ideology and material comfort between this family's bourgeois existence and that of his own, every bit as vast as that which separates the interior of the coal mine from the world at surface level. Unlike that crossing, however, this one results not in pride but in humiliation, this being because there is no pre-established rationale acting to legitimise the labour process as there is with the honourable but tough profession of the coal miner. Moreover, since this labour process

Fig. 5

has no rationalising narrative, it has no ideal body with which to identify either, leaving Phil under no illusions (no pun intended) as to the undignified realities of what it involves. Something else worth noting is that Phil's movements are severely restricted in this world, yet not in the same way that his movements are restricted in the mine (there a result of its cramped confines), since this working environment is its polar opposite: light, open, and above all, spacious. Here the restriction is more artificial, his oversize shoes forcing an absurd lolloping gait, the woman's movements indicating where he may and may not venture. And of course, what makes all this worse is that the work habitus that *is* a source of pride, the work habitus in which he *can* (in symbolic terms) move freely, is on the verge of disappearing forever, hence his analogy of miners with famous examples of extinction. Many have understood that the comedic nature of clowns is a tragic comedy, and for this scene, I would suggest that Phil's outfit is entirely appropriate.

Similar, yet more emotionally charged language (racially charged too) is heard in one of the final scenes from the same film on the occasion of the band's visit to London and the Albert Hall for the finals of the national brass band championships. (By this point in the narrative, the closure of their pit has become a reality). Once again, this is a crossing into another world, the distance between Grimley and London as great as that between the members of the band and those of the audience, the vast majority of them at least. Predictably, the band win the contest, despite their being without Danny,

the band's leader and also Phil's father (Pete Postlethwaite), who is laid-up in hospital back in Grimley, seriously ill with respiratory problems: a direct result of his years at the coalface. (It is a symbolic victory, made so by a comment heard earlier: "come on lads, for a thousand redundant miners and one poorly one.") Unbeknownst to the band, however, Danny has heard about the London trip and has rushed to be there, arriving on stage for the final bars of the performance. At the presentation of the trophy, it is naturally Danny who takes to the podium, yet despite being immensely proud he rejects the trophy and launches into a long and impassioned speech, the main thrust of which is repeated below.

> "Over the last ten years this bloody government has systematically destroyed an entire industry: our industry. And not just our industry, our communities, our homes, our lives. All in the name of progress, and for a few lousy bob. I'll tell you something else you might not know as well; a fortnight ago, this band's pit were closed. Another thousand men lost their jobs. And that's not all they lost. Most of 'em lost the will to win a while ago. A few of em' even lost the will to fight. But when it comes to losing the will to live, to breathe? Point is, if this lot were seals or whales, you'd all be up in arms. But they're not are they, no, they're just ordinary, common garden, honest, decent human beings. And not one of 'em with an ounce of bloody hope left."

Not only does Danny lay the blame for the 'destruction' of the coal industry directly at the door of Number Ten (and by extension, at the feet of Mrs. Thatcher), he also describes much of what we discussed in the introduction to this chapter in terms of that destruction's effects.[231] What is more, he is quite explicit on the subject of its victims, for as we saw both earlier and in the previous chapter, *not* racially marking a term of reference can in actual fact be quite an effective way of marking it white. In discussing Foster, we saw in the previous chapter the way in which neglecting to mention race when describing a person can in certain circumstances, such as when stating hair colour, mark them as simply 'normal,' which in racial terms, means white. Foster calls this process 'denarration,' wherein race is "not narrated, but assumed."[232]

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[231] In an earlier scene, Thatcher is explicitly labelled as the architect of the miner's demise, when Phil, at the end of his tether and close to suicide (an actual attempt follows) launches into the following rant at God, in a church no less. "I mean, what's he doing? He can take John Lennon. He can take those three young lads down at Ainsley pit. He's even thinking of taking my old man, and Margaret bloody Thatcher lives? I men, what's he sodding playing at, eh?"

[232] Foster, op.cit.: 19.

In the introduction to this chapter also, we saw that the image that Danny's speech evokes, of honest, hardworking miners, a group made righteous by their labour, is an overtly racial one, signifying an ideal model of white working class masculinity. Similarly, the analogy between miners and famous example of endangered species places miners in the category of 'species,' a term which in the past has been equivalent to race in its meaning. Furthermore, the analogy is made all the more potent by the (film) audience's knowledge that Danny's son Phil had attempted suicide in one of the preceding scenes. While his sentiments may be laudable, then, and his wish to state an objection to the miner's treatment entirely justifiable, the fact remains that the terms of Danny's speech have their basis in racist notions of white normalcy.

For the men in *The Full Monty* of course, the disappearance of the self-affirming work habitus has been a reality for some time, and we saw in our earlier analysis of the employment centre scene just what a serious effect this has had on their sense of self worth and their peace of mind. The film's logic, however, works from this point to find a solution to their anguish. That suggestion (as the employment centre scene's last moments suggests) is the forming of the 'unit' mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, each member of which is united in their effort to transform themselves into male strippers. That this course of action has the potential to provide these men with something that they have been missing in unemployment (or worse, degrading employment) is suggested at a number of points in the film. To the extent that it demonstrates the seriousness of the emotions involved in the changes in circumstances of the white male working class since deindustrialisation, one of the most interesting is the one in which Dave and Gaz come across Lomper (Steve Huison) in the act of suicide. The scene presents the opportunity for a classic 'our town from the hill' shot, familiar from the 'angry young man' films of the 1960's, and thus roots the scene in white working class male discontent, and puts the film in dialogue with those films (fig. 6, overleaf). Its message is conveyed in the final exchange of dialogue, wherein the fact that Lomper now has friends, or rather, "mates," in Dave and Gaz, is what banishes his suicidal thoughts. The point is expressed even more explicitly in a scene that follows shortly after this one: as Gaz says, for Lomper, joining in with the project to become strippers is a form of "therapy." The film's logic suggests that the same is true for them all.

A similar logic functions in *Brassed Off*, the colliery band taking the place of the strip troupe as the home of the 'unit' in which its members can locate their sense of

Fig. 6

selves. This is of course what is suggested in the scene described a short while ago, the band's victory at the national championships, the means by which they are able to regain their self respect, as well as a new source of pride. As a colliery band, the band also represents the work habitus, and in the absence of that, such as occurs once the pit has been closed, acts as its replacement. That the band functions in this way is in fact stated outright in the film, when Danny, replying to the suggestion that "if pit goes, the band'll go with it," declares: "If they close the pit, knock it down, fill it up, like they've done with all the rest, no trace, years to come, there'll only be only be one reminder of a hundred years hard bloody graft: this bloody band!" Cohen, discussing what happens to the ideal model of white masculinity that labour provides in the circumstance of unemployment, confirms that the replacement of the work habitus with some other form of social unit, or with its idea, is precisely what happens.[233] He names "the neighbourhood," "the football team" and "the family", all as viable candidates for such a unit, and states that one of its primary roles is to function as something in which its members can locate their sense of selves, and most importantly, their whiteness.[234] The point that this chapter has been arguing towards, in conclusion, is that the strip troupe in *The Full Monty*, the colliery band in *Brassed Off*, and although we have not discussed it here, the institution of ballet in *Billy Elliot*, all function as a 'replacement habitus,' and

[233] Cohen, op.cit.: 255.
[234] Cohen, op.cit.: 255.

provide their members with a new source of identity, as well as a new source of whiteness, in the age of deindustrialisation.

Chapter 3 – The Alien Within: Examining the Representation of Irish Travellers in *Snatch*

"He is Negro who is immoral. If I order my life like that of a moral man, I simply am not a Negro. Whence the Martinician custom of saying of a worthless white man that he has "a nigger soul." *Color is nothing*."— Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*.[235]

So far in this thesis, whiteness has meant only one thing – privilege – and no matter how crisis-ridden the white male's existence has been (whether in real or imaginary terms), whiteness has always been there for him to fall back upon: a guarantee of this place at the top of the social strata. In this chapter, we move into rather different territory; here, our focus is those moments at which the argument that 'whiteness equals privilege,' begins to falter. We look at how in the face of certain socio-racial groupings, the strict binaries of the 'Manichean dualism' (which recognises only white and black) appear to relax, or failing that, to collapse under their own inbuilt tensions. In other words, we examine those moments when race seems not so much a question of black or white, but rather of varying shades of grey.

3.1) The Burning Issue: Whiteness and the Infamous Firle Incident

On the evening of October 25th 2003, as part of its annual bonfire procession, an effigy of a caravan bearing depictions of Irish traveller children was paraded along the single narrow street of the village of Firle in rural East Sussex. It was one of the main centrepieces of the celebrations, a place traditionally taken by locally unpopular figures, and had been selected by the Firle bonfire society as a suitable symbol following tensions in the village over a recently evicted traveller community's illegal occupation of private land in the area. At the culmination of the reliably popular parade, a speech was given, following which the organisers set the half-size timber and cardboard effigy alight before enthusiastically urging the crowd of onlookers to chant – "Burn them!

[235] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. C. L. Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967) 192., (my emphasis).

Burn them!" as the painted faces of children and the presumably specially commissioned number-plate "P1 KEY" were consumed by the flames.[236] Remarkably, it was not until several days later that the first official complaint was lodged by an onlooker, although once this was made and the story had been picked up by the popular press, others soon began to come forward to express their feelings of anger and disgust at what they saw as the effigy's deeply inappropriate and offensive nature. Rapidly, testimonies surfaced which described cries of "shame" and "racist" as being issued from the crowd during the burning, whilst one witness, perhaps the most perceptive of them all, commented with incredulity: "the last people to burn gypsies were the Nazis in their concentration camps. We all like to think things are so different now, but are they?"[237]

Whilst condemnation of this kind was certainly amply attested to in the wake of this incident, the suggestion that 'things' perhaps really aren't so different now resides in the fact that the public reaction to the incident also had its counter-side, as the parade's organisers by no means found themselves entirely without supporters. Well-wishers left messages on the society's website praising their 'good work,' and one is reported to have challenged the incident's opponents to "try living next door to pikeys and see whether you still feel the same way."[238] Moreover, a number of reports described the crowd's cheers of approval on the night, and the general approach to the story in the press was characterised by a tone of cautious ambivalence that suggested that the editors, in this case, were uncertain on which side their reader's sympathies were likely to lie. The result of this situation was that the details of the incident were in the main coupled with a proviso, this formed by an emphasis on the general 'nuisance' value of the traveller's actions leading up to the incident, a consequence which thereby offered, if not a degree of justification, then at least some account of motive for the organiser's actions.[239] As the story's momentum gathered apace, comment was sought

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[236] "P1 KEY" is meant to denote the word 'pikey' (sometimes 'pikie' and in the US, 'piker'), a slang word taken from British English which Tony Thorpe has defined as follows: "a gypsy or vagrant. The term now properly denotes one of the travelling people who lives in a settlement". Notably, what Thorpe doesn't add is that the term is generally regarded to be offensive. Thorpe, Tony. *Dictionary of Contemporary Slang*, London: Bloomsbury, 1997: 296.

[237] See: Barker, Will. 'OUTRAGE AT 'BURN THE GYPSIES' BONFIRE NIGHT,' The *Sun*, 30/10/03; Payne, Stuart. 'Effigies of Gypsies are set alight at village party,' *The Daily Telegraph* (London), 30/10/03; McGreevy, Ronan. 'Traveller bonfire in Sussex village 'incited racial hatred,' *Sunday Times* (London) 2/11/03; Michael Veshengro Smith, Lucky Dogs and Lee Fuller, 'Backlash against gypsies,' (Letter) *The Guardian* (Final Edition), 7/11/03.

[238] (Payne, ibid).

[239] (See particularly Payne, McGreevy, ibid.) Much of this commentary is, however, revealing inasmuch as it suggests there was at least as much resentment directed at the traveller's apparent economic prosperity – it is always irksome when someone refrains from fitting neatly with their stereotype – as at

from the Commission for Racial Equality, whose chair Trevor Philips responded by describing the levels of discrimination faced by traveller communities in the UK as surpassing that of any other 'minority', claiming: "[f]or this group, Britain is still like the American Deep South for black people in the 1950's."[240] The media frenzy that raged for the weeks and months that followed further intensified with the arrest of the parade's organisers under the 1976 Race Relations Act on charges of incitement to racial hatred, a circumstance which unleashed what Mark Townsend of *The Observer* referred to as "condemnation and bafflement" from nationwide sources. Finally, the story resurfaced once more on the acquittal of those accused, an outcome that was founded, interestingly, on grounds of insufficient evidence. It was during this time that the most pressing questions begged to be asked concerning the appalling disenfranchisement of traveller communities in Britain today,[241] however it is revealing to note that at least as many column inches were devoted to the consideration of such matters as to the repeated affirmations of the Firle bonfire society's spokesperson in insisting that, "there was no *racial* motive" behind the actions of those accused.[242]

When encountering such a story, especially if for the first time, it is reasonable to surmise that many will have perceived a certain unsettling tendency in its events, in its discourse, its imagery – one might register a certain closeness, a certain familiarity, a certain anxious feeling that one has seen or heard of such things before, and yet, *differently*.[243] It is not enough to say that this unsettling affect is borne from one's moral or political disapproval alone, an observation to which the intensity and longevity of the public response bears testament. After all, as regrettable as the admission may be, it is fair to say that such acts of gross and detestable injustice occur on a daily basis, but that only the tiniest percentage will ever have the least amount of newspaper lineage

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their 'antisocial behaviour,' McGreevy comments: "[the villagers] were furious because the [travellers] towed their caravans with luxury cars, including a Porsche, a Bentley, a Land Rover and a Mercedes." (op.cit.).

[240] (McGreevy, op.cit.)

[241] This disenfranchisement comes in many forms; in legal terms: valid permits for sites are often revoked with minimal notice, petitions to purchase land are frequently barred by local protest from the settled community; in educational terms: relative illiteracy among traveller children is common and relentless bullying frequent; in health terms: registration with a G.P. can be a problem, and life expectancy is significantly lower than in the settled community. See the C.R.E.'s information and 'Strategy for Gypsies and Travellers 2004-2007' at: http://www.cre.gov.uk; also, Acton, Thomas, Alan. 'Gypsy Politics and Traveller Identity,' Hartfield, University of Hertfordshire Publishing, 1997.

[242] Sapsted, David. 'Villagers in the clear over gypsy bonfire,' in *The Daily Telegraph* (London) 8/7/04, my emphasis.

[243] From the author's perspective, this unsettling feeling is enhanced by the circumstantial fact that Firle is not more than 12 miles away from where these lines were typed.

ascribed to their coverage – this being the case, one can only surmise that something beyond mere disapproval has been triggered here. In many ways Trevor Phillips had it right when he referred to the American 'Deep South' in his response to the incident, for it is largely from the notion of post-bellum U.S. race relations that these images derive their impact in the public imaginary – 'ritual burnings', 'racial hatred', 'discrimination', 'disenfranchisement' – such is the language of abhorrence, bigotry, and *lynching* that haunts this story. And yet there is a fundamental problem with such comparisons, a stumbling block that nags at one's mind regardless of the talk of 'race relations' and 'racism', a problem that not only refuses to go away, but which is also altogether too *evident* to be avoided if one stops to consider what exactly is going on in terms of power, visibility (or its lack), and 'marking' in these events. It is there in much of the language of the story, in chairman Phillips' comparison but qualification of 'this group' from 'black people,' in Townsend's 'bafflement,' in the claims of the lack of a '*racial* motive' to the incident, and even, one might say, in the phrase that carried the legal force to collapse the trial: 'insufficient evidence.' Not having been party to exactly what evidence the trial *did* have at its disposal one can only surmise that perhaps the vital element missing from the prosecution's case was 'sufficient' evidence of the victimized party's (and the victimizer's for that matter) *race* in itself – picturing the trial, one can almost hear the tone of incredulity in what might have been the counsel for the defence's closing statement – "why, but Your Honour, these two groups of people are *the same*!"[244]

The one word that is missing in these discussions is of course 'whiteness,' for it is the *whiteness* of the travellers (and in a lesser sense, that of the parade's organisers) that is really at issue here.[245] This is perhaps not surprising, because as has been shown in previous chapters, it is quite normal for whiteness to go unmentioned in all sorts of situations, and for a whole host of different reasons. Here, the reason for the omission is simple. Insofar as a charge made on racial grounds must take, by definition, the

[244] Needless to say, I am practising semantics out of context here as a phrase such as 'insufficient evidence' does of course carry specific meaning within legal discourse that does not carry through unaltered into what might be referred to as public discourse and therefore cannot, strictly speaking, be interpreted in the sense implied here. That having been said, the point is defensible inasmuch as if such a phrase takes on a different meaning upon entering the public domain this 'secondary' meaning is then contingent not to legal but to public discourse and there is therefore no reason why it should not be held to account as such.

[245] By the travellers' 'whiteness' I refer merely to what is commonly known as biological race, or more strictly speaking, to epidermal hue. In my usage of these terms I differentiate them from matters of cultural distinctions or ethnographic origins, which I place within the scope of 'ethnicity' and with which I will deal separately.

quality of 'race' as its primary focal point, a situation such as the one in question, wherein each party is – racially speaking – white, is highly problematic in light of the fact that as Richard Dyer has noted, in contemporary discourse, the very notion of 'race' "has come to mean (…) any racial imagery *other* than that of white people."[246] If the 'white race' is a kind of 'non-race,' then how can racism have anything to do with the actions of the parade's organisers, or of those cheering members of the crowd that night in Firle? (Such is the argument that this situation invites). In a sense, there is some validity to such a line of reasoning, as clearly this is not a question of racism in what might be described as its literal, or 'common sense' interpretation, in that one has the tendency to pathologize an individual or a group of individuals of different epidermal hue on the basis of that difference. However it is in this insistence, or to put it more accurately, this *presumption* that racism's prerequisite is a *literal* difference in skin colour between the victim and their victimizer alone that prevents the application of even such a reductive notion of racist behaviour as this in our reading of the Firle incident, and as this chapter will proceed to highlight, this 'skin difference' isn't nearly as significant an issue as it might initially seem.

Importantly, what *is* significant in the racist's actions is that they function along the double axis of affirmation and exclusion ("I *am* of the desirable/correct/superior race, he *is not* of the desirable/correct/superior race"), a model that when applied in its stubborn rigidity to the circumstance in question can only ever conclude that these were either not the actions of the racist, or else more disturbingly, that regardless of appearance, one of the parties involved must not, in actual fact, be white. This is a battle that is played out, therefore, on the very grounds of whiteness itself, the whiteness of the effigy-burners as much as that of the travellers – a battle in which the blows are exchanged through the machinations of racial politics at their keenest, and in relation to the ongoing state of which the territory lines of whiteness are continually drawn and re-drawn to dictate the limits of what whiteness can, but most of all, *cannot* be. It is the currents of this conflict that this chapter will trace in a representative example of recent British cinema, focusing on the wide range of images that pose a threat to the ascendancy of hegemonic whiteness from within, on the ways in which these images have the potential to throw the potency of the white masculine into jeopardy in return,

[246] Richard Dyer, *White* (London: New York, 1997).

and the ways in which a whole spectrum of politicised regimes of representation are continually called upon to attempt to keep them in check.

3.2) Snatch – 'Particularisation' and the 'Elsewhite' Space

In the search for a text that might elucidate the further workings of these kinds of ideas at a cinematic level, one need look no further than Guy Ritchie's highly successful crime comedy *Snatch* (2000) before the alarm bells of recognition begin to clamour all too fervently.[247] Recalling the unsettling feeling of the Firle incident mentioned earlier, it is fair to say that those familiar with the film may have experienced such a sensation with a dramatically increased intensity, as at times the circumstances of the incident veer entirely too close for comfort to the narrative and visual content of Ritchie's text. The complex plotline involves a disparate set of characters: a pair of hapless bare-knuckle boxing promoters, a diamond thief with a congenital gambling problem, a small-time posse of pawnbrokers turned would-be armed robbers, a hyper-masculinized vigilante man-tracker, a racially mimetic diamond merchant and his American gangster relative, an "unhinged, pig-feeding gangster"', and a half-crazed arms-dealing Russian; in relation to any one of whom one might readily pursue a whole variety of interesting questions regarding how white masculinity's ostensibly 'always already' privileged status can be affected by the changing intersections of race and gender. More than any of these characters, however, the aspect of the film that most clearly bears the markers of the battle for whiteness is its often highly problematic portrayal of an Irish traveller community itself, a group that in the register of the film are given the same derogatory label as that towards which the Firle bonfire society felt compelled to direct their collective and 'potentially' racist anger – "pikey". There is even, unbelievably, a similar 'caravan burning' (fig. 1, overleaf) – conveyed in such an overtly stylised manner that the effect is almost pornographic – so that what is perhaps most revealing is that at its British release, the film's content and dialogue met with none of the widespread condemnation that was just three years later heaped upon the Firle story.

That the film did not meet with storms of protest is, in actual fact, remarkably surprising – not to mention troubling – as even if one only considers its negative stance

[247] *Snatch*, Guy Ritchie, Columbia Pictures Corporation; SKA Films, UK/USA, 2000.

Fig.1

in the linguistic framing of the travellers, the damage that can be effected through such 'labelling' strategies alone is enough to condemn the lack of public outcry. Throughout the film, either the group or its principle representative, Mickey O'Neill, are referred to variously in Ritchie's characteristically expletive-ridden script as "a pack of fucking pikeys," "pikeys or gypsies," "a wild gypsy," "the pikey," or "the gypsy." Clearly, the quantifiable effects of such repressive discourse are that the group becomes both dehumanised and deindividualised through frames of reference that either position them as animalistic – a *pack*, *wild* and so on – or else eradicate their potential for individuation by reducing the characters merely to their group type, namely, not 'Mickey', but rather, 'the pikey.'[248] Similarly, in several of the scenes that precede the group's first appearance, the very concept of 'pikeys' is introduced as a wholly negative identification, as two separate characters on different occasions indicate an anxious suspicion at even the thought of this particular socio-racial group, and both also stringently express their dislike in the same terms: "I fucking *hate* pikeys!" Bearing the film's insistent expression of this vitriolic attitude in mind – which, incidentally, is hammered home by the phrase's repetition on a further two occasions – one might readily be forgiven for suspecting that its message is that we, as audience members,

[248] There is of course the possibility that there is a self-reflexive element to Ritchie's use of such dialogue in the same way that the use of racist dialogue in, for instance, Quentin Tarantino's films, has been claimed to be self-reflexive (not least by Tarantino himself). However, I firmly believe that the comparison is not a fair one, since the black characters that populate Tarantino's films are, potentially racist dialogue notwithstanding, presented in a highly positive light, since they are shown to bear the mark of cool (a subject to which I will return in the following chapter). This is most certainly not true in the case of the Irish travellers in *Snatch*, and they of course also have to bear the brunt of racist dialogue.

either should, or more disturbingly already do, feel much the same way about this group too.

As was the case in its use with the Firle effigy, the film's use of the term "pikey" is not as what might simply be called an 'unloaded' frame of reference, that is to say, one without implied political force, but is employed, rather, as a term whose function is as fundamentally *ideological* as it is disenabling for those to whom it is applied.[249] Make no mistake, this is a word whose use is intended to cause as great a level of offence to the traveller community as the word "nigger" has universally held for a person of colour before being appropriated as a positive term when used in certain contexts.[250] However, whilst this kind of labelling strategy is undoubtedly ideological in its own effects, the film's negative positioning of Mickey and his community is by no means limited solely to this method, for on the contrary, it takes the form of a highly focused representational strategy whose effects can be traced in a pattern that permeates the film, filtering through narrative and shot structure, lighting, music, *mise en scene*, and the play of intertexts at least as much as through dialogue alone. Admittedly, were one to assume for the moment that the negativity of the group's portrayal could be taken as a given, the question does, however, remain as to just *what* such negativity has to do with the traveller's whiteness, much less with the notion of a threatened or ascendant white masculinity. In point of fact, bearing the traveller's 'unconventional' lifestyle and unesteemed real-life social status in mind, it might seem that such an ideological stance could be more convincingly attributed to a distaste for the unknown or an ill-disguised class-prejudice rather than resulting from the complex interweaving of racial and gender politics. The point to be emphasised however, is that it is only when one engages in a closer reading of both Mickey's and the wider traveller community's portrayal in the film that one begins to notice the way in which they are from the very beginning

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[249] Such a claim is supported by the fact that as Mickey's character is first introduced, he in actual fact gives his express preference as to what others should call him, that is, Mickey, and not Mr. O'Neill. This, however, does not appear to affect how he is referred to by other characters, as the only time they actually consent to use this preferred term is when in direct negotiation with Mickey himself, indicating that their use of the terms 'gypsy' and 'pikey' is not simply as relatively benign slang phrasings, but rather as terms intended to imply offence that they would understandably rather avoid in a face to face confrontation.

[250] Whether such an appropriation is either possible, or ever likely to happen in the traveller's case, whereby the traveller community might be able to 'embrace their pikeyness' as an enabling quality or some such thing, is, however, in the present climate extremely unlikely, and the author, for one, will not be holding his breath in anticipation. Furthermore, one might argue that the distinction between the two terms is that "nigger" has been, historically, the *target* of whiteness, and does not, therefore, carry the same sting when used by persons of colour to refer to themselves; the use of "pikey", on the other hand does not depend on this 'skin difference' element for its effectiveness and therefore may not lend itself open to appropriation in quite the same way.

subjected to an insistent and somewhat less than subtle process of what can best be referred to as 'particularisation'. In other words, the film positions the travellers not simply in relation to social, material, or class-based normatives – what might be referred to as the 'non-particular' – but also to aspects of normativity that are prefigured as specifically *racial*. In this regard, particularity as it relates to the travellers is of the kind that Dyer described – namely: a quality subject to a *forceful* and more or less complete exclusion from the hegemonic normative.[251] This process of being 'made particular' has a definite and *accumulative* effect, which as we shall see, in many ways impacts most directly at precisely the sites of whiteness and masculinity.

A number of scenes might be pointed to by way of exemplifying this filmic regime with regards the construction of traveller identity, and in some respects those that occur at a later stage of the diegesis might perhaps be those best considered as they are able to demonstrate its more advanced effects. Nevertheless, before turning to later examples, it is justifiably prudent to focus most acutely on the group's introductory scenes for two distinct and relatively simple reasons: firstly, because in any protracted representational form, such 'establishing' scenes do the most 'work' in ideological terms; and secondly, because, as the most extended narrative sequence in which the group play a part, these scenes can most clearly demonstrate the film's 'layering' strategy, negativity upon negativity, that equates to the overall accumulative effect of the group's distantiation from the hegemonic norm. Occurring at around fifteen minutes into the diegesis and at a little over five minutes in duration, the episode's five distinct scenes work together in calling upon a whole range of racially coded binaries within which Mickey and his community become imbued with the mark of particularity to a degree that is established immediately and which increases exponentially as the sequence progresses.[252]

The initial shot with which the scene opens – an extended extreme long shot as Tommy and his bare-knuckle boxing protégé Gorgeous George drive towards the camera in their approach to the traveller encampment (fig.2, overleaf) – is in itself worth discussing at some length, since even in these opening moments the elements of *mise en*

[251] See Dyer (1997), op.cit., specifically 'The Matter of Whiteness': 1-40.
[252] This is to say nothing of the damaging effect of the 'build-up' to the initial scene mentioned previously, which introduces the group, or should I say, the particular socio-racial identity for which the group stands as representative, as a negative element in the narrative even before it has first made an appearance within it. Thus the group's negative portrayal in the introductory sequence has an element of predestination to it – it is made always already negative.

Fig.2

scene can immediately be seen to effect considerable particularising force, leaping to recall and re-establish a number of well-worn stereotypical notions regarding traveller communities. The dominant element of the shot, besides the approaching vehicle – what from Barthes we might call its "punctum" – is the discarded washing-machine and other litter that occupies the near foreground.[253] As the coverage of the Firle incident revealed, much of the animosity that is directed at traveller communities in contemporary society ostensibly stems from allegations concerning the levels of waste associated with the traveller campsites. In the simplest sense therefore, the contents of this image draw upon the pre-existent social tensions that characterise the group in the public imaginary as equal to a form of social pollution in much the same way as one might say that the validity of the character of Bad-boy the "Yardie gangsta" draws upon the pre-existent fears of murderous black masculinity that are firmly rooted in the white imaginary.[254] In addition, the specific *character* of the waste, particularly the washing-

[253] This is perhaps not best illustrated in the static screen shot overleaf (fig.2) for the fact that the vehicle is here placed in shadow at the rear of the shot and the rubbish is highlighted at front, giving the impression that the latter is the 'obvious' focus of the shot (for Barthes its "Studum"), and not the 'punctum' element. However, when one views the scene proper, the combination of the vehicle's centre-framing, oncoming movement, and the sound of its splashing through the puddles, entirely confirms its place as the shot's 'studum' element. Barthes, Roland, 'Studium and Punctum,' *Camera Lucida*, (London: Flamingo, 1984): 25-27.

[254] A small but significant difference exists between these two examples however, in that as opposed to the traveller's portrayal (in which Mickey's is the only fully formed character and must therefore 'speak for' all travellers), the standpoint of the black male enjoys representation in the form of four distinct and fully individuated characters, none of whom are therefore called upon to have to 'speak for' every single black person.

machine, might also be read as having more to say concerning the general 'undesirability' of the traveller community; if so inclined one might infer that it points to a questionable approach to personal hygiene, the community's blackened skin and dress quite literally distancing them from the purity of whiteness. As an item of domestic goods whose 'correct' place is within the domestic environment of the settled community, the washing-machine's existence in the image equally serves to juxtapose that 'correct' domestic space with the current 'perverse' one, once again holding the group apart in ideological terms, that is, as negative, from the position of hegemonic whiteness. Moreover, in terms of its import for the traveller's racial positioning, one of the most significant aspects of the image is the way in which the lush vegetation is framed, making it appear as if it threatens to swallow up the approaching vehicle, thereby associating the travellers with a kind of menacing organicicism, both close to nature, and with more sinister implications, correspondingly, *of nature*.[255] Taken individually, one might argue that such representational instances have little overall consequence, especially given the fact that they form part of a text whose place in its chosen genre depends on representing all of its characters in a more or less unflattering light in the interests of extracting humour from their actions and interactions. However, when taken together, and in light of the fact that no other group is subjected to as sustained a level of representational bombardment on account of its socio-racial position alone, it becomes impossible to ignore that the travellers, meaning, by extension, *all* travellers, are held apart in the film as a special, and altogether undesirable case – or perhaps, as a special, and altogether undesirable *race*.

As significant as these visual aspects undoubtedly are, before moving on it is worth questioning whether the single most striking element of these opening moments is perhaps not visual, but rather, auditory in nature. When one encounters this brief shot, it seems entirely possible that it could just as readily be the accompanying musical

[255] This quality is further emphasised by the choice of vehicle type (a rugged 4x4), which one could argue gives the sense that its occupants are intrepid explorers plunging into some form of natural (or perhaps cultural) 'wilderness'. It is also worth noting that of the six sets of characters, each of which is associated with certain specific spaces (Turkish and Tommy with their warehouse space and arcade, Vince and Sol with their pawnbroker's shop and so on) Mickey's is the only one to be associated with an outside, rural space, thereby bringing into play the tired binary of metropolitan, sophisticated town versus parochial primitiveness. Furthermore, this is one of only two domestic spaces shown in the film (the other being Boris' house), and has to serve a dual purpose as both living and business space, a circumstance which not only implies a troubling blurring of the boundaries of public and private, but which when tied into its out of doors nature might also be said to further emphasize the 'animalism' of the traveller community, inasmuch as like animals, the travellers are to all intents and purposes shown to both live and work *outside*.

refrain, or, should I say, the specific *character* of the musical refrain, that effects the biggest pull on the viewer's attention – though quite why this should be does not become apparent until through its repetition, one is able to establish that the piece serves in the film as a leitmotif for the traveller community. Needless to say, the use of this technique is as old as the cinematic form itself (and much older in theatre and opera), and as is always the case, its analysis can provide invaluable insight into what we might call filmic or authorial intent, inasmuch as it clearly demonstrates what particular qualities, moods or events the spectator is being asked to associate with certain characters at certain moments. This being the case, one could be forgiven for expecting that something along the lines of a merry jig on a 'fiddle' n' low pipes intended to connote some all-purpose sense of 'Irishness' might have been the musical choice in this regard. What, however, the spectator in actual fact encounters is a surprising arrangement of rhythmic drumming, melodious chimes and a tenorous wailing instrument that, without the benefit of musical expertise, might only be described by saying that it is the sort of thing one could expect to find in the 'ethnic and world' aisle of your local music store. The piece is unaccredited in the soundtrack, and it is not therefore possible to discern whether this is a sample of genuine Romany or 'gypsy' folk music, or simply part of the other original music composed for the film. Effectively, this matter is, however, incidental, as what *is* significant are not the origins of the piece, but rather what the spectator (read the white spectator) is likely to understand by it, or more to the point – *where* the spectator is likely to recognize it (or its likeness) from. The answer to this is that in any audio-visual form one could care to name, it would be possible to find quite literally countless prior contexts upon which such a recognition could be made, though the significance of the matter is not so much a question of frequency, as one of consistency in what music of this type has universally been intended to connote – that is, a general notion of *exoticism*, or '*foreign-ness*'. Ultimately, one could say that this is the kind of musical refrain that might be given the generic title of 'Arabian Nights' on a sound effects tape; that the spectator is likely to have learned to associate with a vague expectancy of barbaric acts and peoples; that, above all, 'fits', in standardised representational terms, with Technicolour images of far-flung lands and unfamiliar races, but not, fundamentally, with the image of whiteness.

There is little getting away from the fact that the combination of visual and auditory cues from this initial seven-second shot alone invoke as much ideological force in attempting to 'other' the traveller's identity from hegemonic whiteness as they would had these been images of black people living in the jungle wearing animal skins and shaking spears to the accompaniment of chanting and drumming; the crudeness of which hardly warrants mention. Furthermore, if there remained any doubt as to whether this 'othering' impacts upon the traveller's whiteness as opposed to any other aspect of their identity, one need only consider the shot's accompanying dialogue – "[t]his is a campsite. A *pikey* campsite" – alongside the commonsense definition of racism forwarded at this chapter's opening. If, in only the simplest sense, the racist discriminates against those of a different epidermal hue on the basis of that difference, then we can say that the identification of their target takes place primarily on a visual level – that is, on precisely the same level as Gorgeous George assesses the space of the travellers, inasmuch as he simply 'recognises' the mark of particularity in nothing other than what he sees – 'this is a campsite, a pikey campsite.' Of course, it is in no way guaranteed that this recognition *has* to have anything specifically to do with differences perceived in relation to his own whiteness, though if one remembers the fact that such differences, focused as they are on variations of epidermal hue, are more than any other register of difference fundamentally visual in nature, it is safe to assume that a difference that *can be seen* is in many ways thereby most likely to imply a difference from whiteness.[256] The validity of this notion in the context of traveller identity is supported by the way in which the group has in reality been constituted in some cases within the tension-ridden communities themselves, as there have reportedly been cases of some public facilities displaying signs that read 'No travellers.'[257] The implications of this regrettable practice are obvious, being that those who are guilty of having actually displayed such signs in their place of business would presumably not have done so had they not believed in their enforceability. It must be stressed that what this

[256] Obviously, one could say that *all* stereotypes are in some respects signified in visual terms, and any number are also signified in terms of the individual's body – the limp wrist of the homosexual, the huge penis of the black male and so on. The significance is, however, that race, in the sense of epidermal hue, is the only register of difference whereby the body as a whole, rather than a specific attribute of the body, is able to 'speak for itself' in recalling its stereotype, and that all other stereotypes require the provision of extra information, namely, what sex/class/nationality/sexuality and so on the individual is before the stereotype can effectively formed and supported.

[257] Chris Myant of the CRE is reported to have commented: "We don't get notices saying, 'No Blacks, no Asians,' but we get reports on a weekly basis of signs in public houses and restaurants saying, 'No travellers'" (McGreevy, op.cit).

essentially means in a British society within which the majority skin colour is the same as that which the travellers would at least *appear* to possess, is that these people would therefore have to believe in their ability to somehow quickly and conclusively identify who falls into the excluded group "travellers" and who does not – which, at the end of the day, is no different from saying that they would be able to distinguish every 'normal' white person from the 'abnormality' of the travellers. Ultimately, it would seem that the traveller community's desired (if not universally realised) nomadic lifestyle and consequent spatial indefiniteness shares a depressingly ironic commonality with the way in which Ritchie's film positions the group in relation to whiteness, as in both respects they occupy a space of liminality, a space that is neither here nor there – both a chosen *elsewhere*, and through ideological coercion, an unavoidable *elsewhite*.

3.3) Whiteness *Despite* Difference and the 'Alien Within'

So if, as can be established from this initial shot, it is possible to say with a reasonable degree of certainty that the travellers become marked as somehow different from hegemonic whiteness in the film, how might such a difference be interpreted in terms of diegetic meaning, and what, therefore, might the consequences be for traveller identity as a whole? The choices, in answering such a question, are relatively simple in themselves, though each inevitably raises a number of further complications – namely, are we talking, with this notion of an 'elsewhite', of differences that can nevertheless still be contained *within* whiteness, or of differences so momentous that they necessarily fall completely *outside* the scope of whiteness? It is difficult to arrive at such a conclusion with any certainty, and as the visitors, representing the position of ostensibly secure hegemonic whiteness, enter into and negotiate their way through the 'elsewhite' space in what is both their own and the viewer's first encounter with the travellers (that is, during this same initial sequence), this difficulty is in many ways only intensified, as the available textual evidence seems at times to oscillate between support of the one conclusion and then, by turns, the other. For example, the 'jungle' of vegetation, exotic music, and visibly defined difference of the initial shot could be seen to prompt the viewer in their reading of the scenes that follow – the suppliant and curious swarm upon the white man's entering vehicle (fig. 3, overleaf), the incomprehensible language, the comical or backward ways and people, the untrustworthy natures, the confrontation, the conflict, the peril. As was the case with the musical refrain, each of these circumstances

could be read as drawing upon countless prior examples from cinema alone: from the 1933 *King Kong* and 1965 *She* to 1984's *A Passage to India* and *Indiana Jones and the*

Fig. 3

Temple of Doom; from 1996's *The English Patient* to the more recent *Mummy* series; precedents exist that have spanned the decades since cinema's inception, all of which have taught the viewer to recognise this particular sequence as an encounter between whiteness and some vague but deeply imbedded notion of the 'native' – that is, an *outside* to whiteness.[258] Conversely however, the casting of Brad Pitt in the role of Mickey (fig. 4, overleaf) might equally be read as having all the implications suggested of "star persona" from a 'Dyerian' perspective, inasmuch as it too draws upon a rich depository of intertexts comprised of his previous roles.[259]

Of these, several are particularly significant in this context, most notably the roles of Early Grayce in Dominic Sena's *Kalifornia*, Jeffrey Goines in Terry Gilliam's *Twelve Monkeys*, and Tyler Durden in David Fincher's masterful *Fight Club*.[260] The significance of these roles, and therefore what they bring to *Snatch*, is that whilst these are portrayals of, respectively, an unwashed, sniffing and spitting serial killer, a

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[258] *King Kong*, Meridian C. Cooper, RKO, US, 1933; *She*, Robert Day, ABP/Hammer, UK, 1965; *A Passage to India*, David Lean, EMI/John Brabourne-Richard Goodwin/HBO/John Hayman/Edward Sands, UK, 1984; *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, Steven Spielberg, Paramount/Lucasfilm, US, 1984; *The English Patient*, Anthony Minghella, Buena Vista/Tiger Moth/Miramax, US, 1996; *The* Mummy/*The Mummy Returns*, Stephen Sommers, Universal/Alphaville, US, 1999/2001 respectively.

[259] See Dyer, Richard, *Stars* (London: BFI, 1979); *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987).

[260] *Kalifornia*, (Dominic Sena, Polygram/Viacom/Propaganda/Kouf/Bigelow Productions, US, 1993; *Twelve Monkeys* (Terry Gilliam, Atlas/Classico/Universal, US, 1995; *Fight Club* (David Fincher, Art Linson/Fox 2000/Regency/Taurus, US, 1999).

physical tic-suffering psychiatric patient, and a violently psychotic megalomaniac, and thus are all, like the travellers, construed as outsiders in social terms, marked with

Fig. 4

differences that are more or less unacceptable within the mainstream (read white) identity or morality structure, one could also argue that there is little in these portrayals that imparts a level of difference that is extreme enough to contradict with Pitt's own 'skin-evident' whiteness to thereby exclude him from the category completely. In this respect, therefore, the argument follows that theirs is not a difference that falls outside of whiteness, but one that whilst unacceptable, nevertheless still falls *within*.

In the context of this argument, the character of Early Grayce is perhaps the most revealing of these roles in terms of their potential effects for the viewer's understanding of Pitt in *Snatch*. Pitt's performance in the role is something of a master class in the repugnant, perfected by the way in which he punctuates Early's dialogue with a catalogue of grunts, snorts and sniffs that accentuate the highly disagreeable nature of a character whose psychotically violent acts are just the most extreme means by which the viewer is made to feel generally ill at ease. In a number of ways, this performance might be seen to be mirrored within Pitt's later portrayal of Mickey, a factor most notable in Mickey's conduct whilst hung over before the second of his illegal fights, suggesting, perhaps, that a certain commonality was perceived by either actor or director between the two characters which was therefore intended to be put across to the more cinematically well-versed of the viewers. The true significance of such a possibility is that when watching Sena's film, it becomes obvious that Early's

character might be read directly within the representational boundaries of 'white trash,' America's own discriminatory term for the white political underclass.

As an offensive and widely used social stereotype, the term and concept 'white trash' has been the focus of considerable academic attention in the US in recent years, forming a major part of the general project to which Robyn Wiegman has given the name 'whiteness studies.'[261] Quite apart from their interrelationship through these films, the terms 'pikey' and 'white trash' are undoubtedly, politically speaking, bedfellows, as regardless of what are also their considerable differences, the two groups that find themselves labelled with such terms are both subject to a treatment and positioning in society that in every other context but whiteness would go by the name of racism – given this commonality therefore, this body of writing on 'white trash' might profitably be used to shed some light on the current argument.[262] The way in which Annalee Newitz and Matthew Wray have defined their work in this area is here significant, being that they have explicitly described the task of theorising 'white trash' as that of deconstructing "the differences *within* whiteness", stating, most significantly, that one of the most important factors of 'white trash' is that it is "marked as white from the outset."[263] From this perspective therefore, one of the basic assumptions of whiteness can be said to find support, as the notion of 'race' here remains equal with epidermal hue, inasmuch as no amount of difference is able to contradict the white skin and thus the whiteness of the 'white trash,' and thereby through their apparent commonality, the travellers also. Needless to say, such an argument also impacts upon one of the other major assumptions of whiteness, though it does not so much as offer support but rather lay it to waste, as the idea of a group marked with both whiteness *and* difference that is played out as disenfranchisement throws the monolithic notion of whiteness equalling privilege into disarray. Ultimately, whilst these and other underprivileged white groups may possess the one, they most certainly do not enjoy the other, a situation that has prompted Jim Goad, another white trash theorist and himself a

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[261] Robyn Wiegman, "Whiteness Studies and the Paradox of Particularity," *Boundary 2: An International Journal of Literature and Culture* 26, no. 3 (1999).

[262] Jim Goad has described white trash as "the last cardboard figure left standing in our ethnic shooting gallery," a judgement that might be said to be as true for the status of traveller identity in the UK as it is for the group intended. Jim Goad, *The Redneck Manifesto* (New York: Touchstone, 1997).

[263] Annalee Newitz and Matthew Wray, "What Is 'White Trash'? Stereotypes and Economic Conditions of Poor Whites in the United States," in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, ed. Mike Hill (New York UP, New York, NY, 1997): 169. Significantly, this second factor does not apply to any of the stereotypes of traveller identity, a point to which I will return in due course.

self-confessed 'redneck', to angrily declare, "when they say "the white man," I say, "WHICH white man?""[264]

If this position *within* whiteness is indeed assuredly secure, the next question to ask in this context, is of course whether, assuming for the moment that the commonality of 'white trash' and traveller identity can be taken as read (as is at least *possible* to do within the framework of diegetic meaning in *Snatch*), they might both be said to occupy a similar position therein? In the case of 'white trash', Newitz and Wray have defined that position as constituted by "the white other" – it is interesting to note that with this term also the subject remains 'marked as white from the outset' – suggesting that from an outside perspective, namely, from the position of the white hegemonic normative, the 'white trash,' in their whiteness, might be understood in some respects as akin to a kind of 'alien within.'[265] Taking this, and the implications of the term's postfix, 'trash', in mind, which as Newitz and Wray suggest, implies that "its must be discarded, expelled in order for whiteness to achieve and maintain social dominance,"[266] one is reminded of Julia Kristeva's observations on abjection.[267] Described by Kristeva as the unsettling quality of that thing which is both I, and not I, both fascinating and repugnant, of a kind with and yet perhaps more disturbing even than Freud's *Unheimlich* in its sheer proximity, the 'abject' might conceivably be said to be the most fundamental element within such a conception of the 'alien within'. The implications of the abject are perhaps easiest understood with recourse to its most unsavoury manifestations, bodily fluids and excreta, as the abject is that which threatens the unity of body and self in its unravelling of the (psychical) boundary between where 'I' ends, and where the 'not I', the other, the excrementum begins – as Kristeva comments, "it lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which,

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[264] (Goad, op.cit.p.41).
[265] (Newitz/Wray, op.cit.p.168).
[266] (Newitz/Wray, op.cit.p.170). As noted earlier, this association with waste is another quality shared by both the terms 'pikey' and 'white trash', as in the UK travellers' sites are strongly associated with unacceptable rubbish levels, the major point being that this is what might be called 'unsanctioned' waste, as opposed to the sanctioned, and supposedly less damaging waste produced by the settled community.
[267] Kristeva, Julia, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982). Simon Reyonlds and Joy Press have remarked of the status of the US rock band Nirvana, who have also been cited by Newitz and Wray as one of the unwitting purveyors of "white trash chic" (Newitz/Wray, op.cit.p.180), as constituting a form of "abject masculinity" in a move that unites the three strains of argument. They describe the band's success as "a desperate attempt by the rock community to resurrect the phallus (a return to hard, masculine aggressive sound, to rock as a signifier of youth rebellion). But the crucial qualifier is that it was a *failed* attempt, closer to flaunting the scars of castration." Reynolds, Simon; Press, Joy, *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion and Rock and Roll*, (London: Serpent's Tail, 1995): 97.

nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects."[268] This rejection takes the form of a constant and aggressive disavowal; like the so-defined 'trash' element of whiteness, the abject therefore, is that which the subject is compelled to violently expel from within, an action that even in doing so undermines the very foundations of that unity which it is designed to protect, as the impulse to expel from within is also the impulse to expel a part of oneself – in Kristeva's words, "I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish *myself*."[269] This denial, therefore, this desperate declaration by the subject that "this is not a part of me; this is separate, other; I am myself and this is this", is not simply a defence against a political threat, but a threat that drives to the very root of existence, of selfhood.

If, as Howard Winant has convincingly argued, whiteness is at least to some extent subjective, we might say that for the privileged white subject, the 'threat' perceived as inherent in such figures of the 'white other' as the British travellers and the white permanent poor of the US can be seen as manifested through the cycle of abjection – put simply, "if I am my whiteness and they are white also, then I am as they are, and this is what that cannot be".[270] Significantly, this is not to say that these groups somehow *are* the abject, for the abject is neither subject nor object (sharing only one aspect of the latter, namely, in its "being opposed to I"), but is rather a quality, a feeling, an *affect*.[271] Perhaps it might be said therefore, that this can to some extent explain the unsettling feeling remarked upon during the earlier discussion of the Firle incident, as if it is the 'trashiness' of the travellers that sets them apart from hegemonic whiteness, then it is from within this quality, real or perceived, that we might expect to issue an affect that is potentially derived from the abject.[272] If one recalls what it was that constituted the 'punctum' in the initial shot composition of the 'elsewhite' space in *snatch* (the item of litter/trash), wherein what was symbolised appeared to have been

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[268] (Kristeva, op.cit.p.1). Thus when Mickey lavishly spits out a wad of phlegm at the scene's opening, it is not just a cursory nod to his earlier role of Early Grayce, but also a direct encounter with the abject.
[269] (Kristeva, op.cit.p.2).
[270] See Winant, Howard, 'Behind Blue Eyes: Whiteness and Contemporary Racial Politics,' in *off White: Reading on Race Power and Society*, eds. M. Fine; L. Wens; L. C. Powell; L. Munn Wong, (New York: Routledge, 1997): 40- 49.
[271] (Kristeva, op.cit.p.1).
[272] Such an explanation might also go some way towards explaining the story's long-running and wide-ranging nature, for as remarked earlier, the fascination, obsession even, with both the Firle story itself as well as what is figured as the general 'problem' of travellers – their living conditions, their conflict with the settled community – seems to be an issue that is hardly out of the news even now, over a year and a half after the event. Perhaps the traveller, therefore, holds the attraction as well as the threat of the abject.

chosen purely for its ability to call to mind such an inference of 'travellers equals trash', then this notion can only be validated, especially when one considers how it was that Barthes defined the 'language' through which it was spoken, the 'punctum,' as that "element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me."[273] Ultimately, it would seem that from the position of hegemonic whiteness, that is, from the position represented as much by that of the effigy burners as that of the 'not elsewhite' characters in *Snatch*, an encounter with the travellers, is also an encounter with the sting of the abject.

At this juncture therefore, discussion appears to have come some way down the line of supporting the notion that the particularity of the travellers places them in what might be referred to as the position of whiteness *despite* difference, as opposed to the contrasting and exteriorised position of difference *despite* whiteness. However, up to now there is one major assumption that, for the sake of argument, has been left to stand unchallenged, but which from this moment onwards can no longer remain so. This is the assumption that a commonality founded upon more than simply situational similarities – similar living conditions, shared lack of political representation and so on – somehow exists between these two groups of disenfranchised whites on either side of the Atlantic, to the extent that what is essentially suggested, is that these groups represent some kind of 'international equivalence,' implying that what may be tenable, critically, for the one, will necessarily be so for the other. Significantly, the issue over which the unacceptability of such an 'equivalence' most fully comes to a head is precisely in the relation of each group to hegemonic whiteness, taking us straight back to the same basic question of whether the group's difference falls either within, or outside the scope of whiteness. As suggested, this is a simple enough question to answer in the case of those who are branded 'white trash,' as their stereotype, whilst damaging in innumerable ways, nevertheless acknowledges them to be 'white from the outset.' The significance of the fact that this is markedly *not* the case with any of the stereotypes of traveller people in the UK cannot, therefore, be underestimated. Indeed, considering the weight of examples that have already been noted wherein the group appears to have been positioned in representational terms within situations that simply do not 'fit' with what we understand as the 'normal' representational schema of whiteness, one begins to wonder whether we *are* actually talking about a white people

[273] (Barthes, op.cit.p.26).

here at all. Rather, in many respects it seems more the case that the whiteness of the travellers might be conceived socially (and diegetically within *Snatch*) as merely an inconsequence, though significantly not in the same way that whiteness of the hegemonic variety is considered by its bearers an inconsequence, simply 'normal' (for there is great power in the normative), but rather, as something of such triviality that it is reasonable, obvious even, that it should be disregarded entirely – in other words, *denied*.[274] What such an implication suggests, of course, is that the apparent (but far from) age-old relationship between whiteness and white skin may be a far less reliable measure of racial distinction than it would lead us to believe, for whilst it may be true that every white person is also likely to have white skin, it does not therefore follow that *all* people with white skin will necessarily be deemed to be white. Could *apparent* whiteness therefore really sometimes be: nearly-but-not-(qu/wh)ite?[275]

3.4) Difference *Despite* Whiteness and the 'Symbolically Raced Other'

The idea that white skin may be a prerequisite, yet not a sure-fire *guarantee* of whiteness might to some, seem a little far-fetched. After all, it is likely that one would have considerable trouble in making such a claim for any other epidermal hue convincingly: to claim that African skin might not always mean 'blackness' or suchlike. So what makes whiteness different? The answer is of course that whiteness has *always* played by a different set of rules to those that it applies to its 'others,' and so in reality, there is little reason to assume why there should be any exception in the one instance that is essentially of the greatest importance to it – namely: who can be allowed 'in,' and who must be pushed 'out'. In point of fact, as Eric Lott observes, we are already quite familiar with the idea that a person with white skin can in certain situations 'take on' some of the (stereotypically) established properties associated with a different epidermal hue, as this is essentially nothing less than what we imply whenever we use terms such as 'black-hearted' or 'dark intentions' in speaking of a white person.[276] That for the most part we fail to recognise such terms as racially derived does not alter the

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[274] Though perhaps *selectively* denied could be more accurate, as the outcome of the Firle trial may suggest.

[275] In speaking of colonial mimicry, Homi Bhabba uses the twin phrases "*almost the same but not quite*" and "*almost the same but not white*" as a way of desribing the discrepancy between a perceived 'genuine' whiteness and the colonised subject's appropriated whiteness. Homi K. Bhabba, *The Location of Culture* (London, New York: Routledge, 1994).: 86,89. See also Fanon on this subject (Fanon, 1967).

[276] Eric Lott, "The Whiteness of Film Noir," in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, ed. Mike Hill (New York: New York University Press, 1997).

fact that by a single action, their application ejects the white subject from their otherwise 'skin-evident' whiteness whilst simultaneously imprinting them with the indelible 'mark' of race. Moreover, the everyday use of such a notion of race appropriation is by no means limited to the linguistic level, for in many respects we are as equally familiar with its uses and meanings in visual terms. Moreover, as we saw in chapter one, in the case of cinema there is a long tradition of audiences being required (and perfectly willing) to suspend their acknowledgement of a performer's white skin to instead read them through their diegetic positioning and associated markers of ethnicity as 'Other' to hegemonic whiteness, that is, as *raced*.[277] This, of course, encompasses instances such as the blackface minstrelry with which the age of the 'talkie' was heralded in with the 1927 *The Jazz Singer*, as well as the bizarre practice of casting white performers to play roles as non-whites.[278] However, what is more interesting in the current context is not such instances whereby the white subject is diegetically held to be 'literally' raced, but those more frequent, and far subtler moments when they are 'metaphorically' raced, as whilst the one proceeds by obfuscating or diverting attention away from the performer's white skin (with make-up, wigs, sartorial signifiers and so on), the other is able to do so *in spite of* it.

Returning to the analysis of *Snatch*, it is possible to discern the influence of each of these tactics in the representation of Mickey's character and the traveller community for which he stands, as by varying degrees he becomes marked in ways that one could argue impart both 'literal', and 'metaphorical' race. As suggested by previous discussion, when watching the film one becomes aware of an intention for the travellers to be read as the possessors of particularity, but it is significant that this particularity is written in terms that together speak explicitly of *ethnicity*, for this, as the work of Dyer

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[277] That *Snatch* is perfectly comfortable with such a notion on the level of diegetic reality is demonstrated by the figure of 'Doug the Head,' played by the perennially cockney white comic and actor Mike Reid, who "pretends that he's Jewish (…) because he thinks it's good for business. And in the diamond business, it *is* good for business," suggesting that hegemonic whiteness can be taken up or cast aside by the white subject as the situation suits.

[278] *The Jazz Singer* (Alan Crosland, Warner, US, 1927). On blackface minstrelry see particularly: Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelry and the American Working Class* (New York: Open University Publishing, 1993).; Michael Rogin, Paul, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkely: University of California Publishing, 1996).; W. T. Lhamon, *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 1998). As Gwendolyn Audrey Foster notes, a number of performers, Jeff Chandler, Jack Palance, Burt Lancaster, and Victor Mature among others, either began from or even based their entire careers on playing roles as non-whites, casually flitting between the position of Native American, Arab, Egyptian, or Oriental as the role dictated, in a game of racial interchange that all the while disavowed what beneath the wigs or make-up, was their epidermal whiteness. Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, *Performing Whiteness: Postmodern Re/Constructions in the Cinema* (Albany, NY: State U of New York P, 2003).

and others has suggested, is not something that whiteness is easily able to bear.[279] Needless to say, if one sticks faithfully to the letter of the concept, (British) hegemonic whiteness is in itself a specific ethnic identity, but as Julien Isaac and Kobena Mercer commented in one of the earliest contributions to the field, in real (read: ideological) terms, it manages to avoid being regarded as such because it has "been rendered 'invisible' by the epistemic violence that has, historically, disavowed difference in Western discourses."[280] This, of course, is the situation that gives rise to the term used legally to define the traveller community: 'ethnic minority'; which, when considering the fact that it encompasses a vast array of racial, cultural, and religious groups whilst it only *excludes* the single group possessing hegemonic whiteness, might in some ways be considered a misnomer.[281] As for whether or not the mark of ethnicity thus carried by traveller identity is 'compatible' with whiteness in any respect however, such comments as "[t]here are gradations of whiteness: some people are whiter than others" (Dyer); "[p]eople's whiteness appears to be both a matter of choice (…) and an unstable social cachet threatening to betray their baseness at any moment (Thomas DiPiero); and "[w]hiteness exists only when hybridity and otherness are erased" (Gwendolyn Audrey Foster); whilst admittedly inconclusive on this note, at the very least suggest that if theirs is not a whiteness of the hegemonic variety, it might just as well not be whiteness *at all*.[282] The point is, however, that this essentially amounts to *the same thing* as a 'literal' racialisation, for if the particularity of a specific white subject fails to conform precisely to the model protected by the ideological 'invisibility cloak' noted by Isaac and Mercer, they are not so much seen as a different *type* of whiteness, but rather, as its complete 'other' – and most importantly, as *visibly so*. Crucially, these protective borders of whiteness are not fixed and immoveable but fluid and discursive, meaning that in different situations or at different historical moments they can by turns either

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[279] (Wiegman, op.cit.p.123). I refer here to the specific character of the associations made during moments such as those discussed earlier, (the initial shot composition, musical refrain and so on), which connote a sense of exoticism or 'foreignness'.

[280] Isaac Julien, Mercer, Kobena, "Introduction: De Margin and De Centre," *Screen* 29, no. 4 (1988): 6.

[281] Whilst both the CRE and the travellers themselves seem content that this term is accurate in its application to traveller peoples (as suggested by the gypsy council's description of government policy regarding travellers as tantamount to "ethnic cleansing"), some in the academe have remained less than satisfied on the same point. As George Gmelch comments, a study dedicated to the issue of Irish traveller's claims to "ethnic separateness" that appeared in the mid nineties wavers in its judgement, leaving him to uncertainly ponder of the Irish traveller as an ethnic minority, "Are they are aren't they?" Gerber, Gmelch, [Untitled Review] of *Irish Travellers: Culture and Ethnicity*, eds., M. McCann, S. O'Siochain, J. Ruane, Belfast: Queens University of Belfast, 1994.

[282] (Dyer, op.cit.p.12); Thomas DiPiero, "White Men Aren't," *Camera Obscura*, no. 30 (1993): 124.; (Foster, op.cit.p.86).

exclude or include the same subject or group from their confines.[283] This, ultimately, may have been what happened during the Firle incident and subsequent trial, that is, the travellers may have in the first instance been considered sufficiently 'non-white' for the charges of racism to have been brought, and in the second 'welcomed' back into the fold to avoid a political storm. Nevertheless, for the duration of *Snatch* at least, the boundary of whiteness continues stable, and there appears little doubt on precisely which side of it the travellers are to remain.

Whilst such 'literal' racialisation as this is doubtless more obviously founded upon offensively reductive notions of the non-white 'other' than its 'metaphorical' counterpart, the formation of the latter is nevertheless effected through means that are every bit as brutal in ideological terms, and has implications that are in many respects of far greater significance, both for the assured security of white hegemony, and for the continuing fate of the non-white 'others' whose bodies, as Lott asserts, "give rise to and move in the shadows of [the] images" through which the imprinted 'mark' of race is spoken. In looking at the ways in which such images and means are utilised diegetically in *Snatch*, it becomes possible to critically trace a path through all of the ideas so far discussed, and to arrive at a conclusion as to how these arguments ultimately relate to considerations of masculinity and the related status of the cinematic white male. Returning to the initial sequence, one can discern that the three principle qualities that the viewer is being prompted to associate with Mickey and the traveller community within the diegesis are *ethnicity* (which, as suggested, equates to a 'literal' racialisation); *deviousness* or amorality (in the sense that the group are presented as untrustworthy or scheming); and *unpredictable, devastating violence* (in the way in which both their aggressively quick tempers, and Mickey's almost mythically potent masculine force are highlighted). It is the second and third of these qualities that are the most relevant in this instance, since Lott, taking the example of *film noir*, has explained that character association with negative behavioural qualities such as these might be

[283] As discussed in the previous chapter, David Roediger is particularly clear on the validity of this point in the US context. Through sociohistorical analysis he demonstrates that historically, white skinned migrants were bestowed with whiteness as a way of diffusing class tensions and to facilitate the exploitation of nonwhites. Whiteness in this respect acted as a form of compensation or 'wage' that promised privilege but which merely distracted from the reality of class disenfranchisement and labour exploitation. In this context, Mickey's community's 'Irishness' is particularly significant, as the Irish were one of the principle groups treated in this way, and the method was all the more effective in their case due to the fact that their socioracial position within the British Empire from which they arrived in droves had been on a par with that of the Negro, namely, non-white. See: David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991).

read precisely as a means of metaphorically imparting race. Arguably, in some respects such instances might be read as potentially undermining for hegemonic whiteness – inasmuch as they reveal the falsity of white moral purity – yet on the contrary, Lott actually goes so far as to describe them as "the refuge of whiteness."[284] What he means by this is that in the event of the white subject committing an evil or immoral act, whiteness as an unimpeachable ideal manages to remain untainted, precisely because within the formal constraints of *film noir* (which, of course, if literally translated means 'black film'), in doing so they become symbolically raced, and thus are no longer held to be either a part of, or representative, of whiteness.[285]

Of course, I am not suggesting that *Snatch* belongs to the genre of *film noir*. What I am suggesting, however, is that since the idea of one's becoming symbolically raced through negativity is, as was mentioned earlier, a familiar one, it would not be unreasonable to expect its replication within a popular cultural artefact such as the text in question. Borne out of the 'everyday' association of lightness with good and darkness with bad – thus to be bad is to be dark and thereby not to be light (white) – such racial metaphors have a fundamentally ideological basis that is all too easy to forget, a fact that is demonstrated no more clearly than by their having survived through more than forty years of liberation politics to continue to tacitly discriminate against all non-white people to this day. What is most important in this situation, however, is that whilst the dark figure of negativity and difference that racial metaphors generate is drawn from a whole spectrum of discourses relating to different non-white peoples, it is also true to say that it has no more archetypal or powerful representative than that of the black male, for if to be bad is to dark, then to be 'baddest' is to be darkest, thus, black. As Frantz Fanon has commented, "the real Other for the white man is and will continue to be the black man," and so it is to this mythical figure that we can therefore turn in the hope of ultimately providing an answer to the diegetic significance of traveller identity in *Snatch*.[286]

In looking at the five scenes that make up the initial sequence then, how might this formidable figure of black masculinity be seen to reflect on the film's construction

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[284] (Lott 1997, op.cit.p.85).
[285] This 'crossing over' from light to dark is normally effected through *noir's* distinct visual style, primarily in the use of chiaroscuro lighting techniques, which, as Pam Cook and Mieke Bernink neatly summarise, "opposes light and darkness, hiding faces, rooms, urban landscapes – and by extension, motivations and true character – in shadow and darkness." Pam; Bernink Cook, Mieke, ed., *The Cinema Book*, 2nd ed. (London: BFI Publishing, 1999): 185.
[286] (Fanon, op.cit.p.161).

of the 'elsewhite' travellers, and what are the resultant effects for their interaction with the visiting agents of hegemonic whiteness Gorgeous George and Tommy? To reiterate, the travellers are constructed in such a way that one could arguably read them as progressively imbued with symbolic 'race' over the course of the sequence, but it is in the change of emotional tenor that one is able to gain an indication as to the specific *type* which that 'race' may be implied to have taken. What for the viewer is unavoidably evident in this respect is a heightening of emotional intensity, a progressive escalation that builds in the wake of the traveller's mounting particularity, and which places them in an increasingly vulnerable position as they sit and helplessly wait for an anticipated 'something' to happen. Gorgeous George's comment in the opening moments – "I promise you, *this* will get messy!" – points to the root cause of this situation, as from the very beginning it cues up for the viewer an anticipation of some foul moment of *violence* that is subsequently played upon for the remainder of the film. It is precisely in being thus associated with an expected but unpredictable violence that begins to reveal the connection of the traveller male with the figure of the black male, and as this violence is deferred and the expectation intensifies throughout the sequence, this connection grows ever stronger.[287] It is with the fight scene that this situation comes to a head, and as Mickey and Gorgeous George pit themselves against each other in physical confrontation – which, like all such scenarios, is a wager made on the stake of one's masculinity – a clear contrast develops between the two men in which the figure of the black male plays a significant part.

A rapid cut jumps into the scene, and the long-anticipated moment of violence suddenly bursts onto the screen without warning, impacting as much upon the viewer's heightened sensibility through the camera's position in the impact zone as it does upon the jaw of the blow's recipient.[288] Importantly, however, the source of this violence is not that which was expected – namely: the traveller – but rather issues *from* the agent of

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[287] Their violence is both expected *and* unpredictable in the sense that it is presented as inevitable, but also as impossible to predict in terms of timing. This violent quality is gender specific to the traveller male; being that Ritchie's filmic milieu is largely an all-male world, with the place of women reduced to ephemeral, supporting roles. However, the one portrait of the traveller female we have available, Mickey's mother, makes it clear that it locates the traveller female on the opposite pole of human agency, as she is both the one for whom things are done in the diegesis, and also ends up being the victim, and not the perpetrator of a violent act.

[288] It is worth noting that the 'ethnically' marked musical refrain plays over the beginning of this scene, thereby connecting it with the refrain's first appearance, which in itself coincided with Gorgeous George's 'prediction' of violence – "This will get messy" – thus conveying a sense of inevitability and confirming the notion that violence and the traveller male go hand in hand. That having been said, the scene does also contain a considerable shock element in line with the pre-defined notion of traveller

Fig. 5

hegemonic white masculinity *upon* the body of the 'elsewhite other.' Consequently, the deferral of the anticipated violence thus continues, and the expectancy only intensifies. This process repeats itself with every blow that Gorgeous George lands, as all the while the viewer, as they have been led to, *expects* Mickey's reaction, *waits* for him to fight back, for him to suddenly do something terrifying. Adding to this they are unlikely not to register that there is also something disturbingly perverse, or as Gorgeous George himself declares, "sick", in the manner in which Mickey simply 'takes' the brutal beating to which he is subjected, is able to make light of it, stretches and limbers up between blows (fig. 5, above), seems unaffected, undominated: a perversity that seems to imply that his response, when it finally comes, may be coloured with the same quality, that his violence may also be somehow perverted, perhaps *sexual*.[289] Once

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violence as expected *but also* unpredictable, this being emphasised by its being the only one of the sequence which does not feature some degree of a 'build up' to it's main point. This tendency is discernable in each of the sequence's scenes except this one – the clearest example being perhaps the drawing out of the initial departure scene where Tommy and Gorgeous George initially set out happy with their newly purchased caravan commenting (regarding the travellers) "I dunno what all the fuss was about, they ain't such bad fellas" *before* they are proven to have been correct in suspecting them all along as the said vehicle's wheels comically part company with the chassis – effectively maximising the shock value of this direct launch into violence as though the spectator has been to led to expect it, they have also been led to expect it to arise not without preamble.

[289] This aspect of the scene represents a highly complex moment in gender terms, as it places Mickey in an indeterminate position with regards masculine and feminine sex role types. In one respect, his submission to the beating could be interpreted as revealing masochistic tendencies, defined by Freud as an exclusively feminine trait. However, the ability to withstand such a beating also represents a display of masculine physical mastery and authority, leaving a sense of ambiguity regarding Mickey's gender identity. See particularly Freud, Sigmund, 'A Child is Being Beaten,' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, trans. J. Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), vol. 17: pp.175-204.

again Gorgeous George stands in for the viewer in registering their likely feelings in this respect, as the strains of doubt begin to show on his face (Fig. 6, overleaf),

Fig. 6

whilst his repeated threats to "stay down" take on an increasingly hollow ring the less he seems capable of inflicting the 'worse' punishment that they imply. This being the case, the viewer is likely to begin wondering precisely which is suffering the biggest injury from this beating, Mickey's apparently indestructibly 'elsewhite' body, or the fragile basis of Gorgeous George's hegemonic white masculine pride.

Where all is this is ultimately likely to lead the viewer is to the conclusion that despite his being the one that is beaten, it is Mickey, and *not* Gorgeous George who is 'in control' of this situation. What must be stressed is that for this to be so, they would essentially had to have subjected the scene's elements to a very specific kind of interpretation, a 'reading between the lines' that firstly takes into account the 'mark' of race, adds to this the sense of impending violence, and subsequently arrives at an evaluation that not only 'sees' the two as intrinsically related, but also fashions the circumstance within which the white male victimizer can be 'seen' not as aggressor, but as victim. Of course, in the current situation, the spectator is *prompted* to come to this conclusion, is assisted in it by diegetic details such as Mickey's taunting quips, his limbering up, and so on, precisely because the film wants us to 'see,' to understand this scene in this way – even though, strictly speaking, it manifestly shows the *opposite* to

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This aspect also represents an inter-textual referencing of Pitt's previous role as Tyler Durden in *Fight Club*, as whom he placidly accepts a similar beating in a direct gesture of masculine authority.

be happening.[290] In the end, the scene implies, and the spectator infers. However, History has taught us that such 'seeing' can also take place when this prompting is absent, in the context of texts that really do appear (at least to some) to contain no ambiguity whatsoever. Even texts that seem to speak for themselves in the most explicit way possible have been 'seen' in ways that run directly counter to the evidence of the seer's own eyes, and it is the history of such 'seeing' – and one infamous instance of it in particular – that might offer an insight into why the scene has been constructed in this way. It is this that finally cements the connection of the traveller male as it is represented here with the mytho-cultural figure of black masculinity, for if this history has taught us one thing, it is that the one circumstance within which the white victimizer can reliably be 'seen' to be not the aggressor, but the victim, it is the encounter of whiteness with the black male. Arguably, there is no clearer example of this lesson's truth than the 'seeing' of the videotaped evidence which occurred in a US Simi Valley courtroom during the notorious Rodney King hearing in April 1992. Ultimately therefore, if one can say that a reference is being made here through the 'elsewhite' traveller Mickey in *Snatch* – and this seems certain to be the case – the black body of Rodney King undoubtedly has the potential to tell us a great deal about the referred.

3.5) Whiteness 'Seen' Black and the Impact of White Paranoia

The Rodney King case has gone down as one of the most controversial episodes in American legal history, attracting at the time a huge amount of both academic and public attention, the vast majority of which was united in its opinion that the original 'not guilty' verdict was the product of a legal system corrupted by the rhetoric of white racism, pure and simple. Whilst I would by no means wish to dispute this fact, I would like to suggest a slight change of emphasis, as it is the exact *way in which* this racist regime managed to infiltrate the proceedings that can tell us the most about what Rodney King as a black male was made to 'stand for' in the trial. It is this more than anything else that can offer a lasting lesson for understanding precisely how white on black racism operates in the social sphere, as well as ultimately provide answers as to how (or indeed, if) the case relates to this encounter of white and 'elsewhite' masculinity in *Snatch*. Judith Butler's analysis is the most revealing of the cases' many

[290] That this is the case is emphasised by the fact that eventually, Mickey is indeed revealed to be more than a match for his opponent in physical terms when he knocks him unconscious with a single blow, as this essentially sends a message of affirmation to the viewer that they were correct in their suspicions all along; upon which, more will be said in due course.

commentaries in this respect, as she investigates the contested verdict not simply as an isolated instance of racism but as part of a wider pattern of racially influenced behaviour that is played out through precisely the kind of meaning-production through 'seeing' that is at issue in the scene in question.[291] Focusing, as did the trial, on the videotaped evidence, Butler highlights the fact that the case for the defence rested on the single claim that Rodney King had presented a *danger* to his LAPD attackers, thereby justifying their actions in repeatedly 'restraining' him, as they can thus be seen to have merely been protecting themselves against the threat which he continued to pose. That such an argument could have been made (let alone believed), when the supporting video evidence clearly appears to show a man being repeatedly beaten *without* offering any visible resistance, was, according to Butler, "not the consequence of [the jury] ignoring the video," but, rather, of their simply 'seeing' it from the entirely different perspective that makes such an argument feasible. She describes this perspective as affected through "reproducing the video within a racially saturated field of visibility," meaning that one no longer simply sees in it 'a man' being beaten, but rather, Rodney King, 'a *black* man.'[292] The outcome of this was that it effectively altered King's 'meaning' in the video, since as 'a black man' it was not only his actions (or in this case, *inactions*) that were to define the part that he would be 'seen' to play in the events that were depicted, but also the whole cultural depository of racial meaning that defined him, his behaviour, and his *potential as* 'a black man.' Bearing in mind the fact that much of this meaning is the product of an overtly racist episteme, this opens up the possibility for racist considerations to have influenced the juror's perceptions of the video's events. However, that this went so far as to bring about two distinct and entirely contradictory interpretations of the same article of visual 'evidence' – one that we might describe as racially *neutral* (Rodney King was 'threatened'), one as racially *produced* (Rodney King was a 'threat') – suggests that this alteration of perception had the effect of not only influencing what King was to mean for the jurors, but also how he was actually to be *seen*. As Butler suggests, "[t]his is not a simple seeing, an act of direct perception, but the *racial production of the visible* (…) a seeing which is a reading," explaining how, in arriving at the decision to acquit which was to stir up so much resentment and

[291] Judith Butler, "Endangered/Endangering:Schematic Racism and White Paranoia," in *Reading Rodney King Reading Urban Uprising*, ed. R. Gooding-Williams (New York: Routledge, 1993): 15-22.
[292] (Butler, op.cit. pg. 15), my emphasis.

condemnation, the jurors managed to 'see,' or read things into the visual evidence, which from any other perspective, were simply *not there*.[293]

If one can argue, therefore, that a distinctive mode of 'racialised' seeing was responsible as to the 'how' of the juror's improbable verdict, exactly to what might one turn in their search as to the 'why' it should've been concluded in this way, or as to the 'where' its cause might ultimately be said to lie? Butler, for one, could not be any clearer on this point, as she asserts that like the 'readings' this mode of seeing produces, the perspective offered is by no means racially 'neutral,' but is, rather, specifically contingent upon an exclusively *white* subject position; suggesting that the case may have more to say on the subject of whiteness than it ever will about the 'endangering' nature of its 'others' such as the black male. There is little to dispute in such an assertion, indeed, one need only consider the example of white supremacist thinking – which, as Wiegman points out, "hinges on a repeated appeal to the minoritized, injured "nature" of whiteness" despite being itself instrumental in 'minoritising' and 'injuring' precisely those 'non-whites' supposed to be responsible – in order to recognise that when it comes to the question of racial privilege, the predisposition to take what might be called a 'racially distorted' view of reality in this way has often gone hand in hand with hegemonic whiteness.[294] What this situation thus instigates, to use Butler's terminology, is a "community of victimized victimizers," the 'white perspective' of which enables one to paradoxically reconcile white on 'non-white' violence with the notion of whiteness as the threatened or endangered party *without* finding a fundamental contradiction therein.[295] Consequently, as proved the case for Rodney King, it is unnecessary for the ostensibly "threatening" party to actually *do anything* to constitute a threat, that is, to fight back in any way, it is merely enough for them to exist uninhibited in the presence of whiteness.[296] It is clear that what we are talking about here therefore, is a question of supposedly latent *potential*, whereby the white subject intuits in their 'non-white other' not simply an always-already-present *capability* of violence, but also an always-already-present *intention* for violence – nowhere more so than with the black male. As Butler states, what this meant for Rodney King was that he was "hit in

[293] (Butler, op.cit. pg. 16).
[294] (Wiegman, op.cit. p.117).
[295] (Butler, op.cit. p. 19).
[296] This was shown by the fact that King's attempts to merely raise his head from the ground were seen as sufficient evidence of his intention to endanger his attackers, and thereby *prompted* the beating to continue.

exchange for the blows he never delivered, but which he [was], by virtue of his blackness, always *about to* deliver."[297]

The point here is of course that not only is the *actual* violent act attributable to the white subject, the violence, or potential-for-violence, which they perceive to emanate from the body of the black male can also be traced back to precisely the same origin, that is to say, within *themselves*. It is nothing other than their own paranoic fear of the awesome spectre of black masculinity – itself a white cultural construction – which impels the causal sequence of violent acts, and it is these self same acts which are then viewed, through this hysterical mindset, as justifiable self-protection. The black male's aggression, therefore, is but a projection of their own brought about by fear; or in other words, the white subject creates in the one motion both the 'necessity,' and the 'justification' for their victimisation of the 'other.' This 'merry-go-round' of act and intent has been termed the "circuit of [white] paranoia" by Butler,[298] and she argues for a turn to Frantz Fanon's oft-cited "Look, a Negro!" passage as a way of understanding its function, asserting that for the white subject, "the black male body is constituted through fear, and through a naming and a seeing."[299] Whilst this is doubtless true, if one bears in mind through exactly what images that fear has been culturally disseminated, the figure of the black male rapist – which might ultimately be reduced even further simply to the *black penis* – perhaps 'looms largest' as the ultimate embodiment of white terror, undoubtedly because what the Hays production code forbade under the name of 'miscegnation' jeopardises most of all is the 'purity' of white racial reproduction, this being interpreted as meaning white racial *annihilation*.[300] With due respect to Butler therefore, it may perhaps be more appropriate in this context to recall one of Fanon's less well known, but equally memorable passages, one which possesses the potential to aid us in understanding precisely this symbol of white terror, and fascination:

> "[The white subject] is no longer aware of the Negro but only of a penis; the Negro is eclipsed. He is turned into a penis. He *is* a penis. It is easy to imagine what such descriptions can stimulate [in the white subject]. Horror?

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[297] (Butler, op.cit. p. 10), my emphasis.
[298] (Butler, op.cit. p.19).
[299] (Fanon, op.cit. p. 111); (Butler, op.cit. p.18).
[300] As Dyer comments, "If races are conceptualised as pure (with concomitant qualities of character, including the capacity to hold sway over other races), then miscegenation threatens that purity." (Dyer, op.cit. p. 25). On the Hays code and its descendents see particularly *The Cinema Book* (Cook/Bernink, op.cit. pp. 8-11).

> Lust? Not indifference, in any case. Now, what is the truth? The average length of the penis among the black men of Africa, Dr. Palès says, rarely exceeds 120 millimetres (4.6244 inches). Testut, in his *Traité d'anantomie humaine*, offers the same figure for the European. But these are facts that persuade no one. The white man is convinced that the Negro is a beast; if it is not the length of the penis, then it is the sexual potency that impresses him. Face to face with this man who is "different from himself," he needs to defend himself."[301]

As this passage suggests, this kind of stereotyped characterisation creates an interesting situation in that its negative effects are to some extent double-edged, impacting not only upon the black male by casting them as sexualised beast, but also upon the bearers of whiteness by engendering within them a very real sense of fear of this terrifyingly unmatchable figure. By no means is this the same thing as saying that such racist practices have what could realistically be called a 'positive side' for the back male, however, it is possible to see how certain of their aspects might perhaps be regarded as appreciably *less negative* than others, and that of these, some might have 'knock-on' effects that are, to some extent, positive. On this note, therefore, one can say that the one thing that the Rodney King trial bears testament to – other than the resilience of white paranoia – is the fact that the black male is, from the white perspective, invested with a *power*; a power which the white subject, despite being its 'giver,' its source, its beginning and its end, will never be able to equal. It is a *physical* power; in that the black male body emanates violence, presents a threat, a danger, all of which, as Butler remarks, is "prior to any gesture."[302] It is a *sexual* power; in that the black male's potency is inestimable, otherworldly, in that his penis *is* the phallus, the unattainable ideal. And thus, it is a *masculine* power; in that it is borne from the two counts above. All in all, it is little wonder that when confronted with the formidable

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[301] (Fanon, op.cit. p. 170). That this view of the black male is shared within *Snatch* is demonstrated by the fact that it features just such an instance in which the black male, figuratively speaking, 'becomes,' for the white subject, the black penis. The scene concerned occurs at an advanced stage of the diegesis, and stages a confrontation between the white vigilante "Bullet-Tooth Tony" and three of the film's black male characters. The monologue given by Tony as these characters stand three in a row before him verbally imposes this transformation upon them, as he draws from their postures a metaphor in which they are made to represent a "big cock" and "his two mincy little faggot balls." Notably, whilst the object of this particular scene is to represent Tony, the white male, as having a masculine authority over the black male via its bluntly phallic references to his authentic (and thus potent) pistol, and their inauthentic (and thus *im*potent) "replica" pistols, it gains its currency as comedy through precisely the same racist images of the black male as sexually ferocious and potent with unrivalled penile size which in their way, grants them a measure of superiority over the white male within the basest masculine register.

[302] (Butler, op.cit. p. 18).

figure of Rodney King, the brave officers of the LAPD felt compelled to 'restrain' first and ask questions later, and that as Butler recalls, one of the jurors, when questioned on her interpretation of the video's racially contested scene, "reported that she believed [King to have been] in "*total control*"" of the entire situation.[303]

In working through this discussion, therefore, it soon becomes apparent that the Rodney King episode can actually tell us a great deal more about what is going on in this encounter between the white George and the 'elsewhite' Mickey than may initially have been expected. Indeed, given the striking number of similarities between these two incidents, it would not even be at all unreasonable to suggest that an actual *direct reference* may be being made. If one summarises the scene's key elements with this in mind, one can say that like King (and every black male), Mickey is conceived as presenting a threat which is 'prior to any gesture,' the expectation of violence having firmly been put in place for the viewer through the functioning of the prior scenes. Like King, Mickey is thus subjected to what might be called a 'pre-emptive' beating, whereby the white aggressor, without provocation, feels both compelled and justified to mete out excessive and prolonged violence as the only means of preventing the blows which they are convinced of receiving should they neglect to do so. Like King, Mickey remains a constant threat throughout his ferocious beating, and thus is likewise endowed with the almost inhuman capacity for pain tolerance necessitated if he were actually to be so. Like King, Mickey is in turn marked as perverse, affected through the obscene display of invincibility resulting from the above, causing the threat of violence which emanates from within him to itself take on a perverted, potentially sexual nature. Like King, Mickey is possessed of a well of latent potential that is strong enough to counteract the events of the present moment, so that instead, a kind of 'present of the possible' overrules. The force that Mickey is perceived as being capable of, and yet is holding back, is imagined to be of such devastating ferocity that despite his being at the moment the beaten victim, he is seen as effortlessly capable of overwhelming his opponent at any time he chooses, meaning that it is *as if* he were 'in complete control' of the encounter all along, and thus it is *as if* he were its aggressor, and not its victim. Like King, Mickey – which, if extended, implies every traveller male – possesses the capacity, merely on the visual level, to engender a sense of *fear*, both in the white subject and upon the white perspective, to trigger a visceral shock, a physical jolt in

[303] (Butler, op.cit. p.15), my emphasis.

their observer, such that it strikes to the very depths of all that is whiteness. And thus like King, Mickey's masculinity is construed as being of a matchless, superior standard to his hegemonic white opponent, for as noted, the physical confrontation between two males in which the claim to masculine superiority did not play a part has never yet occurred, nor, for that matter, is it ever likely to. Given, therefore, this abundance of circumstantial similarity, and that as shown, a convincing argument can also be made for reading this group as symbolically raced 'other' in the film, it would seem that there is but one question that in this situation remains to be asked – is the traveller male diegetically positioned here as somehow *more* than simply 'not,' or 'elsewhite'? Could they also, in a manner of speaking, have been intentionally 'coloured' *black*?

Of all *Snatch*'s 'observations' on traveller identity, there is one fundamental reason that this, without doubt, is the *least* likely to be picked up upon by the casual observer, the *least* likely to be conceded if pointed out, and similarly, by far and away the *most* likely to be thoroughly and vehemently disputed – that reason, the same as that which likely collapsed the Firle prosecution, is quite simply, Mickey's epidermal 'whiteness'. Admittedly, that this should be the case does to a certain extent undermine this chapter's efforts to break down the association of whiteness and white privilege with 'white' skin, though in defence of said efforts, it suffices to say that the ideological resilience of the 'race-skin' bond has proved such that better equipped scholars than myself have also tried and ultimately failed to unseat this notion to any significant degree. That having been said, if one is ready to indulge the suggestion for a moment longer by recalling that the travellers are marked from the offset with particularity, visible difference, and ethnicity; that they are raced as 'other' and deemed to bear a threat which is 'prior to any gesture;' that both diegetically and in 'real' life they are subjected to appalling levels of discrimination and labelled 'intimidating;'[304] and that above all, as Butler and the Rodney King case has shown, white racism has the potential to contaminate the visual field and alter the conditions of what can be called visually 'apparent;' it is but one step further to imagine the scenario in which Mickey really can,

[304] Both the extended coverage of the Firle incident and the general treatment of the traveller community in the popular press demonstrate a tendency to draw comment from the 'settled community' in which the 'intimidating' nature of the travellers is emphasised, oftentimes when the travellers' mere presence is deemed as sufficient to intimidate in much the same way that the black male is seen from the white perspective as 'always already' threatening. This, of course, is in spite of the fact that the barrage of protest that almost without fail issues from the 'settled community' whenever a traveller community is illegally encamped might equally be regarded by the travellers as intimidating, especially given the fact that in this circumstance, the 'settled community' are the ones who are backed by the full weight of British eviction law, and thus it is not they who thus face the continuing threat of homelessness.

in spite of his 'white' skin, be read through the discursive framework of the black male, and be *seen* as a 'black' man. What is seen, moreover, is not a superficial blackness that can be washed away like the face paint of the original racial mimetic. Nor is it a 'metaphorical' blackness from which one can be granted reprieve on 'good' behaviour. Nor is it a political or empathetic blackness like that of the "white Negro" identified long ago by Norman Mailer which, like that of the 'white trash,' remains counterfeit by being 'marked as white from the outset.' Rather, what is seen is a 'blackness' which descends to the very root of existence, from which every last vestige of whiteness has been banished, and that performs discursively as does its namesake in the visible spectrum: that is, it alters the conditions of the visible, and devours all that is light(white).[305] In other words, as Chairman Phillips implied from the very beginning – it seems that for *Snatch* at least, 'pikey' is, as 'nigger' was.

Of the names we might give to such an imaginative/metaphorical/racialised 'seeing' – or rather, its net result for the 'elsewhite' subject – Wiegman has undoubtedly contributed the most workable term with her phrase "discursive blackness."[306] Not only does this term, defined by Wiegman as a quality which "simultaneously particularizes and disidentifies with the political power of white skin," offer a useful means of getting past the not inconsiderable barrier to understanding constituted by *actual* epidermal hue, it also helps to demarcate between the 'blackness' of stereotype (the kind at issue here), and 'blackness' as it corresponds to the way people who identify as 'black' really are.[307] Whilst a subtle shift of emphasis towards the corporeal realm is required of Wiegman's original concept if it to be of most use here – given that the analogy between the traveller and the black male in *Snatch* is drawn more in physical terms than the societal and political ones on which she focuses – it does, nevertheless, offer a useful means to keep the notion afloat in what are otherwise critically turbulent waters. Perhaps the best support for this argument, however, lies in its sheer critical usefulness, as the

[305] Mailer identified the figure of the "White Negro" as a character type to be found within the 'hipster' and 'beat' subcultures that arose on the fringes of American society in the late 1950's, inspired largely by the characterisations found within so-called 'beat' literature, of which the novels of Jack Kerouac, and particularly his most well known, *On the Road*, are emblematic. Kerouac's semi-autobiographical anti-hero's strongly empathise with and admire African-American individuals and cultural forms, most notably blues and jazz music, seeing them as possessing an 'authenticity' otherwise missing within their contemporary mainstream (read white) culture. It is in cultivating similar views that Mailer identifies the figure of the "White Negro" as critiquing white bourgeois inauthenticity through attempts to enter into what he refers to as the Negro's "morality of the bottom." Mailer, Norman, 'The White Negro,' in *Advertisements for Myself*, Cambridge (MA)/ London: Harvard University Press, 1959(1992): 348. Kerouac, Jack, *On the Road* (London: Penguin, 1957(1991)).
[306] (op.cit.p.122).
[307] (op.cit.p.122).

considerable increase in clarity of analysis that such a reading can bring to one's consideration of the film's racial representation of the traveller male is sufficient to confirm that a little 'imagination' on this issue has the potential to go a very long way. The deeper insight that can be gained into the scene in question is a case in point, for if one is willing to take the leap of understanding required to 'see' Mickey 'as' a black male, what before could only be seen as a random collection of diegetic details – his 'always already' inscribed threatening nature, his invincibility, and so on – or, with some acuity, as somewhat inexplicable references to one isolated, albeit infamous, instance of 'racialised seeing,' now begins to fall into place within the pre-defined pattern of (racist) racial association which Butler identified as also being at work during the Rodney King trial. One might say, therefore, that the fight scene plays out in this way precisely because we are *supposed* to read it as an encounter between two opposing claims to masculinity – that of hegemonic whiteness, that of the matchlessly superior mytho-cultural blackness – even though, as a result of the 'race-skin' bond, it is likely that should we do so, it would only ever be unwittingly.

This probable lack of awareness of the 'racialised seeing' necessitated if one is to make sense of this scene, if it is to achieve its desired affect, is perhaps the nodal point of this discussion, for as all cultural commentators are likely to agree, that which is allowed to remain opaque to analysis will inevitably remain so in perpetuity, and so it is imperative for one to always approach such ground interrogatively. What must be stressed therefore, is that the only reason that this scene, this discursive blackening, so to speak, 'works,' is as a direct result of the viewer's own *cooperation*, not simply with the scene's diegetically proscribed reading – although this, in itself, is vital – but also with the stereotypes of the black male that *enable it* to 'work.' This creates an interesting situation in that it draws the viewer into a compromised position that, if made fully aware of, would doubtless horrify the well-intentioned majority. What I mean by this is that in being constructed in this way, that is, first marked with a general notion of 'race' and then, via an inscribed status as latently 'endangering,' with 'discursive blackness,' this and the preceding scenes have sketched the figure of the 'elsewhite' traveller directly from a pre-prescribed character template originally tailored to 'fit' the black male – a template that is located in the racist white cultural imaginary.[308] There is nothing new being said here, but what this means for the viewer

[308] The three steps are counter-dependent, in reading Mickey as 'endangering' in this scene he must first have been seen as 'not-white', and only then, as 'like-black'.

is that in being led to this point – and they must if they are to follow the film at all – they have essentially allowed themselves to become implicated within this chain, that is, to have become *complicit* with white racism.[309] The real sting in this scenario, however, is that as Gwendolyn Audrey Foster has insisted in a similar context, there is little justification to be found for this complicity in a plea of ignorance, for "we are captive audiences unless we make agency our aim. (…) The extreme racism of jungle films [equivalent in spirit to that involved here] was *coproduced* by willing audiences."[310]

Whilst it is undoubtedly right and proper that the full implications of this complicity with white racism should be brought to light, to do so does, however, also emphasise a point which in many ways could be claimed to rather inconveniently protrude beyond the bounds of the argument as it has been established thus far. There is no better representative of this critically 'awkward' element than the two *non-white* jurors who sat in on the Rodney King trial, for whilst it may be possible to convincingly maintain that in such a case, a *white* perspective has implicated the *white* subject within the rhetoric of *white* racism, it is an inevitably more arduous task to maintain that two people without 'white' skin are, in actual fact, white, for if the prior discussion has proven anything, it is that whiteness can hardly be taken as a given even *with* white skin. One might question therefore, where this leaves the state of the current argument, for admittedly, it is impossible to deny that a white perspective, and a white perspective alone, is the only means by which these assertions can be upheld, just as it is impossible to deny that Ritchie's audience in this scenario will not be comprised entirely of white people. An indication, however, that all may yet be well can be gained from the manner in which Butler deals with said 'critical awkwardness,' for she simply passes over the issue without the slightest concern, breezily mentioning as if in an afterthought, and indeed, as a *parenthesis*, that "whiteness as an episteme operates despite the existence of two nonwhite jurors."[311] That Butler is able to be this relaxed in the face of an issue which, if it were granted even the smallest degree of significance, would in a flash effectively topple her (and my own) entire argument does, in a way, explain itself, as it is just that, its *failure* to be granted significance, which in this case maintains the claim

[309] That most viewer's would indeed be horrified by this situation is no over-statement, for to paraphrase Goad, gone are the days when it used to be a brave thing to speak out and say 'I am against racism,' for now it is just about the safest political statement one could possibly make, as in the West we have reached a point in the political climate where some might say it is less socially unacceptable to be a racist even than a murderer, (See Goad, op.cit. 206).
[310] (Foster, op.cit.p.137), my emphasis.
[311] (Butler, op.cit. p.19).

to validity intact. The critical element here is a subtle emphasis between whiteness at the level of the *subject*, and whiteness as an inscribed *perspective*, or in Butler's words, as an *episteme*, for whilst the one may be difficult or impossible for the non-white jurors or viewers to gain access to, the simple fact is that the other is practically impossible for them to avoid. What we are talking here therefore, is a question of 'seeing' *through the eyes of whiteness*.

This takes us back to the notion of the viewer's complicity with white racism, for whilst taking the white perspective in this case places the white viewer in a difficult position politically, for the non-white viewer – and most of all, the black male viewer – this difficulty is not just political, it is also *subjective*. They too become complicit with a white racist outlook, but in their case the effects of this complicity are far more personal, and are far more hard-hitting. In adopting this perspective, the white viewer simply becomes implicated in a regime of discrimination that is directed at their 'other,' and the very worst they can expect as a result would be to be labelled 'racist,' as this regime does not effect them beyond the level of responsibility. The non-white viewer, however, does not stand outside the regime in this way, and in becoming thus implicated within it they are led to a position within which the understanding they are required to make of the figure of the traveller male is a corollary of the white racist imaginary's view of *themselves*. From this position, therefore, the non-white viewer essentially becomes implicated in their own oppression, perpetuates their own stereotypes, is not simply coerced into seeing *through* the eyes of whiteness, but into seeing *themselves* through the eyes of whiteness. Whilst this might initially seem like a highly unusual situation, effectively it is the same as that which Butler was able to so comfortably cast aside due to its 'insignificance', the key to which lies precisely in its sheer *ordinariness*. The requirement to see oneself from one's 'other's' perspective would indeed be an out of the ordinary occurrence, if, that is, this requirement were being made of whiteness.[312] The reality, however, is of course that whilst this is exceedingly rare, the demand to take the 'white perspective' is one that is *continually* made of whiteness' 'Others.' As Dyer states, it is still today the case that "white people make the dominant images of the world," and in their seeing (or more accurately, seeing *through*) hegemonic whiteness as simply 'normal' or 'average,' it also stands to reason

[312] In some ways, this prospect ultimately confirms that it is a question of 'difference *despite* whiteness' and not 'whiteness *despite* difference' with the travellers, for if the white viewer were in this way made to see themselves (or at least their epidermal whiteness) as they see their 'others' the results could be potentially disastrous for whiteness as it currently stands, that is, as 'un-ethnic,' 'un-particular,' and so on.

that in the vast majority of textual representations, a correspondingly 'normal' or 'average' (read privileged white) reader will be targeted – *even in* those (still proportionately rare) instances when what is represented is nevertheless somehow 'other' to the normative, namely, not, or 'elsewhite.'[313] The depressing irony of this situation is that the only ones who fail to notice this fact are those privileged whites for whom the 'white perspective' *is* representative, and these are of course the same people in whose hands the power for change in this matter lies.

By way of conclusion therefore, it is safe to say that whilst the non-white spectator undoubtedly suffers the worse effects in subjective terms from the film's inscribed white perspective, in *affective* terms, that is, on the level of spectatorial impact, it is the white spectator, or more accurately, the white *male* spectator, who in this situation receives the raw end of the deal. As subject of an 'appropriated' perspective, the non-white spectator can never really feel the affective 'sting' of an encounter such as that of Gorgeous George and Mickey in the same way that the white spectator can, for whilst they can be made to identify with the paranoic white perspective brought to bear by the mytho-cultural images of the black male recalled by Mickey's physicality, their relationship to that perspective will always remain just that, an *identification*, and under no circumstances constitute a feeling. Needless to say, this is because the source of white paranoia is to be found nowhere other than within the white subject themselves, with only a secondary reliance on elements within the 'real' world itself, such as the existence of figures like the black male *about whom* they can be paranoid in the first instance. As the non-white spectator only has unmediated access to these secondary elements, and as, in the 'real' world, there is nothing to be found in the black male that warrants paranoia save for that which can be found in every member of the ontological category 'male,' their identification will never run any deeper than is necessary for them to follow diegetic meaning, and will have no effect beyond the moment that the credits roll. The white male spectator, on the other hand, despite having most likely been lured into adopting this perspective, nevertheless *feels* the full affective impact of each of those images that are called upon specifically for their capacity to assault his paranoic sensibilities, and thus is left in a position that can only be described as unequivocally precarious. *Left wanting* in terms of physical effectiveness, physically and sexually *under threat*, *lacking* control, *outclassed* in

[313] (Dyer,op.cit.p.9).

phallic terms, *outshone* in potency terms, *outmatched*, *outfought*, and *outdone*.[314] Moreover, as Matthew Brown charges of Butler's reading of the King trial, this is to "neglect the counterimages that fuel [the black male] stereotype", for as we shall go on to discuss further in the following chapter, such 'positive' images arguably offer a whole other avenue by which the white male subject can be thrown into subjective disarray.[315] The white male viewer therefore, is left in a treacherously unstable position, assaulted from every angle, systematically manipulated in relation to each of their likely anxieties, manoeuvred into position, and only then subjected to the killer blow, what for the jurors of the Rodney King trial would have been like having their very worst nightmares come true – for unlike Rodney King, Mickey really does suddenly spring into attack, and his violence is every bit as devastating as they could possibly have imagined. Ultimately, for the white male viewer, a film such as *Snatch* has the potential to unravel the very fabric of their racial and gendered identity, exposing them not just as a physically and ontologically endangered entity, but also, in the inescapably harsh light of the cinema screen, as the possessors of a class of masculinity which is in every respect, *inferior*.

Chapter Four — "Like a Photographic Negative:" Investigating the Black-White Men of Contemporary British Cinema

> "In essence whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence of color, and at the same time the concrete of all colors; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows—a colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink?
>
> — Herman Melville, 'The Whiteness of the Whale,' *Moby Dick*.[316]

> "I am…blank. I'm really…nothing."
>
> — Will (Hugh Grant), *About a Boy*.[317]

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[314] Moreover, as if to add insult to injury, they also find themselves prone to the reprehensible charge of racism.

[315] Matthew P Brown, "Basketball, Rodney King, Simi Valley," in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, ed. Mike Hill (New York: New York University Publishers, 1997): 104.

[316] I am indebted to Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks' work on whiteness for bringing this passage to my attention. See: Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, *Desiring Whiteness: A Lacanian Analysis of Race* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000): 32.

[317] *About a Boy*. (Chris and Paul Weitz, Kalima Productions/Studio Canal/Tribeca Productions/Working Title Films, UK/US/France/Germany, 2002).

In the previous chapter, I introduced the notion that what I termed the 'elsewhite' male possesses a certain type of power – not unrelated to white racism – over his 'not-elsewhite' counterpart (that is, over the white male), and that this power is transferred, via a process of discursive relations, from the mythically potent figure of the black male. In this chapter, I want to explore this idea more fully, and to question the extent to which whiteness, quite apart from being the all-powerful measure of racial privilege, might in some ways be defined as a negative attribute, both in terms of how its appeal compares with that of other racial identities (particularly 'blackness'), and how its effects impact upon the lived experience of different groups of white men in the UK today. I have split this issue into what I consider its constituent elements, and will deal with each in turn in the chapter's different sections, beginning with the question of 'cross racial mimesis:' or what happens when, realising his racial disempowerment, the white male invokes deliberate strategies for its overcoming. Subsequent sections will be introduced in greater detail as they arise, but will focus on explicit mimesis, implicit mimesis, and the question of white formlessness, or lack. In line with previous chapters, I will begin by contextualising these issues in relation to an actual occurrence (in this case more a series of occurrences, or a development) drawn from recent UK events, before moving on to discuss a broad range of contemporary British film texts, the analysis of which will comprise the bulk of this chapter.

4.1) Wannabes, Wiggers, and Chavs: Cultural Inscriptions of Cross-Racial Mimesis

"I wanna be black," sang Lou Reed in 1978, on the identically titled track 'I Wanna Be Black' off that year's *Street Hassle* album: though as the song's other lyrics make clear, it was a very particular black that he had in mind.[318] Blackness as Reed (or rather, the character in which he is speaking) envisages it, comes equipped by racial right with "natural rhythm," a super-human virility, "a stable of foxy little whores," and a tendency for anti-Semitism; it is stridently political, and brings with it the possibility of becoming, "like Martin Luther King" or "Malcolm X," martyred in the name of a

[318] Lou Reed. 'I Wanna Be Black,' *Street Hassle*, Arista, 1978 (for full lyrics, see appendix 1). I first encountered this song through the work of Kobena Mercer and Suzanne Moore, both of whom make (separate) reference to it in their work on race. Kobena Mercer, "Skin Head Sex Thing: Racial Difference in the Homoerotic Imaginary," in *The Masculinity Studies Reader*, ed. R. Adams; D. Savran (Oxford/Malden (MASS): Blackwell Publishers, 2002): 197. Suzanne Moore, "Getting a Bit of the Other - the Pimps of Postmodernism," in *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity*, ed. Rowena Chapman, Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988): 189.

liberally 'right on' cause. This is Reed at his most controversial (barring, perhaps, the infamous feedback loops of his 1975 *Metal Machine Music*, an album that rocked the music establishment to its very core)[319] and, as both Kobena Mercer and Suzanne Moore have commented, his most parodic.[320] As the twice-repeated line: "And fuck up the Jews" implies (Reed himself was of Jewish descent), with 'I wanna Be Black,' Reed was engaging with matters of identity – both his own, and other people's. The song's objective was clear: to cast the unflattering light of parody not upon what I would (hesitatingly) call 'legitimate blackness,' but upon what Mercer describes as "a certain attitude in postwar youth culture in which the cultural signs of blackness – in music, clothes, and idioms of speech – were the mark of "cool."[321] The word may have changed in the intervening years, but this is a logic that is still very much alive in our own time. Just as that 'coolness' proved irresistibly alluring for those actual 'wannabes' whose attitudes 'I Wanna Be Black' parodies, so, for some, it continues to prove today: a consequence of which is the veritable industry of racial commodification that has sprung up in its wake. Yesterday's Kerouacs, Ginsbergs and Mailers (Mercer cites both the "beatnik subculture" and the literary 'White Negro' as central to understanding Reed's critique) are today's Eminems, Beastie Boys, Kid Rocks, and Mike Skinners, all of whom have made it their (extremely profitable) business to 'tap into' (or should I say 'exploit'?) the very same logic that Reed's song tried so hard to overthrow.[322] 'Blackness,' or indeed, any description of 'otherness,' is now available to us all, on demand, and at a price: a truly egalitarian state of affairs.

In the contemporary British context, the kind of behaviour that prompted Reed to record 'I wanna be black' – behaviour that exhibits what I call 'cross-racial mimetic desire' – appears to have been undergoing something of a renaissance in recent years. Perhaps I should take this opportunity therefore, to briefly explain precisely what I understand this concept to mean, since this is the theoretical terrain through which the

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[319] Lou Reed. *Metal Machine Music* (RCA, 1975).
[320] (Mercer, 2002, op.cit. Moore, op.cit.)
[321] (Mercer, 2002, op.cit.)
[322] (Mercer (2002) op.cit.) Jack Kerouac, famous for almost single-handedly inventing the modern American 'road-novel' with his 1952 *On the Road*, and Allen Ginsberg, whose poetic works included *Howl* (1956) and *Kaddish* (1961)—known collectively as 'beatnik' writers—were key figures in the popularisation of 'black' cultural forms, especially jazz music, as a means of escaping the constraints of mainstream (read: 'white') culture. Norman Mailer, who in 'The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster' (1957), critiqued the 'beatnik' subculture of which such writers formed a part. See: Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*, Penguin Classics ed. (London: Penguin, (1957) 2000). Allen Ginsberg, *Howl and Other Poems* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, (1956) 2002). Norman Mailer, "The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster," in *Advertisements for Myself* (Cambridge (Mass.), London: Harvard University Press, 1959): 337-75.

rest of this chapter will be attempting to navigate a path. The term 'cross-racial mimetic desire' is borrowed from Gayle Wald, who uses it during an article on gender experimentation in the performances (or rather, the personas) of white rock stars such as Janis Joplin and Courtenay Love.[323] In the article, Wald maintains that as well as creating new gendered subjectivities, such experimentation results in the creation of "new (or potentially new versions of old) racialized subjectivities," since the new masculinities (or femininities) that are created, have their basis in assumptions about the nature of blackness.[324] As she states (in reference to the male case): "white male performers seek to "own" the qualities they romantically ascribe to black male performers while simultaneously projecting these qualities onto black performers in the depreciated form of "natural" talent or "biologically-driven" urges"[325] A perfect example of how it is not just rock stars who are subject to such inclinations is Reed's parodic reference to black people possessing "natural rhythm:" an assumption that even Richard Dyer – whose seminal text *White* (1997) virtually invented critical Whiteness Studies – has admitted to sharing.[326] It is this impulse that Wald calls "cross-racial mimetic desire."[327]

Another theorist's work that has influenced my own interpretation of this term is Paul Gormley's fascinating study into the affective-mimetic relations between the cinemas of 'New Black Realism' – characterised by films such as *Boyz N the Hood* (1991) and *Menace II Society* (1993) – and contemporary Hollywood, which Gormley identifies as being a major feature in a branch of Hollywood cinema from the 1990's that he calls the "new-brutality" film.[328] Adopting a broadly Deleuzian approach, he begins from the notion of cinematic 'affect,' which hinges on the idea that the cinematic image has the potential to produce a "body first reaction" in the spectator (since as Deleuze says, a series of "sensory motor links" may exist between the two) which first

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[323] (Wald (1997a), op.cit.: 151-167). Note to self and RM – check male performer's, and take copy of the chapter.
[324] (op.cit.: 152).
[325] (op.cit.: 160).
[326] The admission in question occurs as Dyer relates an experience from his youth in which has was forced to dance alone at a mixed-race social event: "[f]or all my love of dancing and Funk, I have never felt more white than when I danced down between those lines. I know it was stereotypes in my head; I know plenty of black people who can't dance; I know perceptions of looseness and tightness of the body are dubious. All I can say is that at the moment, the black guys all looked loose and I felt tight." Richard Dyer, *White* (London: New York, 1997): 6.
[327] (op.cit.160).
[328] Paul Gormley, *The New-Brutality Film: Race and Affect in Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* (Bristol, Portland: Intellect Books, 2005).

disrupts, and then becomes, meaning.[329] Gormley's understanding of affect mirrors most closely that of Brian Massumi: who, in responding to Deleuze's work, equates affect with intensity, since he (Massumi) sees it as being "embodied in purely automatic reactions most directly manifested in the skin – at the surface of the body, at its interface with things."[330] In other words, the extent to which an image or film text can be said to be 'affective' (Gormley also uses the term 'immediacy' in this respect) is dependent on its ability to produce a physical shock in the body of the spectator which temporarily hinders the interpretive process; or as Linda William's puts it: the affective image will "make the body do things" *before* it is interpreted.[331] Deleuze, however, argued that post-war Hollywood cinema was singularly lacking in this ability; he claimed that a variety of factors had combined to produce a "crisis of the action-image;" that the 'sensory-motor links' between image and spectator had broken down; and that cinema had consequently lost its affective potential.[332] Working from this notion, Gormley argues that the films of 'New Black realism' had overcome these lapses, and that they had shown a way forward for the affective potential of mainstream American cinema that it was to be the new-brutality film's' self-appointed task to follow. As Gormley summarises: the new-brutality film "attempt[ed] to renegotiate and reanimate the immediacy and affective qualities of the cinematic experience within commercial Hollywood," and it did so "by imitating the immediate and bodily response [that is] provoked in white viewers of black bodies."[333]

Highlighting the films of US director Quentin Tarantino as representative of the type, Gormley points out the way in which these films make use of black culture (and most notably, black modes of speaking) "as a means by which to authenticate and self-reflexively produce a certain 'hipness' and cultural cool around their consumption and reception."[334] Again, this is highly reminiscent of the behaviours and attitudes that Reed's 'I Wanna be Black' took such delight in sending up, a point that rather belies the high regard in which Tarantino is held by audiences and critics alike. Moreover, this is

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[329] (Gormley, ibid.: 11, 10); Inset: Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London, New York: The Athlone Press, 1986): 186.
[330]Brian Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," in *Deleuze: A Critical Reader*, ed. Paul Patton (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1996): 219. (Qtd. in Gormley, ibid.: 10).
[331] Linda Williams, "Film Bodies, Gender, Genre, Excess," *Film Quarterly* VXLIV, no. 4 (1992): 14. (Qtd. in Gormley, ibid.: 8).
[332] The 'action-image,' according to Deleuze, was one of several means by which the cinema could be affective. (Deleuze, ibid.: 197-215, and 206). (Qtd. in Gormley, ibid. 19).
[333] (Gormley, ibid.: 8, 13).
[334] (Gormley, op.cit.: 32).

not the only use to which blackness is put in Tarantino's films, since Gormley also notes their tendency to situate blackness as a site of authenticity, affective knowledge, and cultural depth.[335] Ultimately, although he prefers the term "mimetic relations" in describing these issues, Gormley's arguments, like Wald's, provide a sound basis for understanding cross-racial mimesis.[336]

My own interpretation of this term takes it in a slightly different direction, whilst remaining essentially in agreement with both of the applications outlined above. The word 'mimesis' refers of course to the imitation of another person's words, actions, modes of dress, and so on, but it has several other meanings also, one of which is particularly interesting in the context of a study into the relationship between 'cross-racial mimesis' and masculine crisis. This second sense of mimesis comes from the field of Natural History, being a term to describe the "close external resemblance of [one species] to another that is harmful or distasteful to predators of the first."[337] Put simply: the 'mimetic,' is one who mimics another, and a large part of why that Other is chosen may have to do with their seeming more dangerous, or threatening, than either itself or its enemies. In other words, it is the *perception* of the Other as *endangering* that is key.[338] Cross-racial-mimetic desire, therefore (or, more simply, 'the want to be Other'), can be defined as the desire to affect changes in one's 'given' racial identity, based upon certain assumptions about another – some pertaining to its attractiveness, and some to its capacity to threaten.[339] Like any desire, it can be said to take one of two forms: either it is conscious, and, to some extent, acted upon; or it is unconscious, and repressed.[340] Similarly, the first of these forms is itself divided, in this case, into what is best described as its 'open' or 'closed' forms, predicated on the degree to which one is conscious of the desire, and the lengths to which one is prepared to go to achieve its satisfaction: these I term 'explicit,' and 'implicit,' 'cross-racial mimesis,' respectively. With such a schema in place, I believe that it is possible to 'map' the different ways in which cross-racial mimetic desire manifests itself, not only in the minds or actions of

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[335] (Gormley, op.cit.: 37).
[336] (Gormley, op.cit.: 37).
[337] R. E. Allen, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, Eighth ed. (Clarendon Press, (reprinted) 1991): 753.
[338] I do not use the word 'endangering' lightly here, and the inevitable associations that are drawn with the previous chapter's discussion of Judith Butler's analysis of the Rodney King case are, as I will explain later on, very much intentional.
[339] It need hardly be said that although those assumptions may pertain to any racial identity (including whiteness), they most often are held *by* whites, *about* their others.
[340] This is not to say, however, that the desire will not simply manifest itself in different ways.

racial subjects (read, in this instance: white people), but also in the cultural artefacts that are produced by them.

Returning to the contemporary British case then; as I have said, the cycle of attraction, fear, and imitation outlined above is something that appears to be having an ever greater, and ever more visible, effect on British people and British society. So much so, in fact, that it might even help to explain one of the most significant British sociocultural 'events' of the last decade – the birth of the 'Chav.' This figure, no doubt familiar to many of us already, displays many of the tendencies of cross-racial mimesis, but what is most interesting is that it does so in such a way that the mimed object – what Lacan would call the *petit a*: or the 'object of desire' – is continually disavowed.[341] In order to fully understand this, however, one must first understand the specificities of both the Chav's emergence, and structure, and so I would now like to spend a short time in 'unpacking' the complex set of circumstances, words, images, desires, and fears, that have all combined to make up the 'Chav phenomenon.'

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Appearing some time between the period of late 2003 and early 2004, it all began with the entry of a new model of identity, and a new label – the 'Chav' – in British life and the British public consciousness. Hailed as a burgeoning "peasant underclass" that was "taking over [Britain's] town's and cities," the Chav gave a name to all to all that ran counter to what we, as 'average' and 'law-abiding' British citizens, held dear.[342] It was a notion with which many must have sympathised, for within a remarkably short space of time, this word 'Chav' seemed *everywhere*. Apart from being ubiquitous online, it could be *read* in the popular press, *heard* in general conversation, on television or on radio, and even – courtesy of Nick Love's accomplished, albeit commercially unsuccessful *Football Factory* (2004) – *seen* in British cinemas Nationwide.[343] Very soon, an entire 'regime of truth' had developed

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[341] Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: The Hogarth Press, 1977): 62.

[342] Home page text of the website 'chavscum.co.uk. Accessed 3 Jan 2006, URL: <http://www.chavscum.co.uk>.

[343] For practical purposes I will not attempt to reference such instances exhaustively (given that they are now so common). However, particularly representative examples are: Oliver Bennet, "Sneer Nation: They're Known as Chavs, Scallies or Neds. And Mocking Them - in All," *Independent*, 28th January 2004. Iain Miller, "Break out the Burberry - the Chavs Have Found a New Champion," *Independent on Sunday*, 27th February 2005. Stewart Wittingham, "Bored, Game.Whatever," *Sun*, 17 Dec 2004. (All popular press); *Chavs*, (Sky One, Sky Television, UK, 21st February, 2005); *Eastenders* (BBC One, British Broadcasting Corporation, UK, 24th February, 2005) (television). *Football Factory* (Nick Love, Vertigo Films, UK. 2004). Incidentally, in his article Oliver Bennet reports that a "chav film is

around this figure, the express purpose of which was to define precisely those who *were* Chavs, and those who were not. Its message was consistently clear: the Chav was young, male,[344] and largely uneducated; easily identifiable via his 'modded' car, gold jewellery, "Burberry cap and "prison white" trainers;" violent, abusive, *criminal* – the ultimate juvenile delinquent.[345]

So in what way does this figure manifest the effects of cross-racial mimetic desire? The answer in fact lies – in an 'embedded' form – within that very 'regime of truth' mentioned above. Amongst the earliest usage of the word 'Chav' was in the website Chavscum.co.uk, and as such, it represents perhaps the closest thing to a definitive source on Chavs and 'Chav meaning' available.[346] Its 'Chav of the Month' section (users register with the site and are then able to upload 'captured' images of representative Chav types in the hope of winning) is particularly revealing.[347] Urban, and often run down settings are the rule for those images that appear to have genuinely caught their subjects unawares (as are, quite understandably, abusive hand gestures), but the more interesting are those that appear to have been *posed*. Young men, frequently in groups, posture and glower for the camera, their faces obscured, their heads hooded. In terms of style, theirs is (if anything) even flashier than the Chav standard: the colours brighter; the shirts baggier; the jewellery even more ostentatious. Often they are pictured with weapons, barbaric looking knives, or (one hopes) replica handguns, which they point menacingly toward the camera (and by extension, all those who view the image.) The overall intention, it seems, is to appear threatening (or, going back to what I said earlier about the mimetic – *endangering*): a desire that could be said to have as much to do with the structure of masculinity as the social 'problems' of which the Chav phenomenon is presumed to be symptomatic. These young men know that the Chav

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underway," and that the Scottish author Irvine Welsh (a name whose centrality to the contemporary British film revival, such as it stands, can hardly be overestimated) is involved in the project. (Bennet, ibid.).

[344] This is not to say that a female version of the type does not exist (in fact, nothing could be further from the truth; take, for instance, the British comedienne Catherine Tate's comic creation—the character Lauren—whose catchphrase: 'bothered' has swept the country, and whose behaviour epitomises *all things* 'chav,') it is merely that in such instances when it is she who is referred to, the term 'chavette' tends to be used. This is particularly well demonstrated in the forums of the 'chavscum' website, which, insofar as their content is user-generated, give an entirely representative view of the different label's terms of usage in the popular lexicon. See: *The Catherine Tate Show*. (BBC Two, British Broadcasting Corporation, UK, 2004—Present); accessed 3 Jan, 2006, URL: >http://www.chavscum.co.uk/forum/<.

[345] (Bennet, ibid.), (quoting the 'How to Spot a Chav' section of the 'Chavscum' website. Accessed 3 Jan, 2006, URL: >http://www.chavscum.co.uk/howto.php<.

[346] (op.cit.).

[347] Accessed 3 Jan, 2006. URL: > http://www.chavscum.co.uk/4images/ <. Obviously, it is within the bounds of neither common decency nor academic rubric to discuss specific images here—let alone reproduce them—and so I will limit myself to the discussion of general group trends.

notion has people worried, and regardless of the stigma now associated with the term, are more than willing to announce *themselves* as Chavs, to play up to the image: a move that in and of itself takes that image further. Thus the sportswear, the gold jewellery, all the outward markers of Chav ontology are present, but here their meanings are altered; here the items of sportswear are 'threads, the jewellery 'bling:' a transformation that is brought about precisely because the Chav does not wish to hide his Chav nature, but to *emphasise* it, to distil it to its basic constituents.

The result – the Chav *par excellence* – goes a long way to confirming the Chav figure as deeply implicated in the processes of cross-racial mimesis. However, without one final detail, one hitherto unmentioned 'constituent,' that confirmation can only ever be a partial one, regardless of the many clear reasons why that would seem *not* to be the case (and there are *many* reasons). For instance, those so-called 'chav-markers' mentioned above bear more than a passing resemblance to the various elements of what Annette J. Saddik has called the "gangsta pose" more rightly 'belonging' to black (or rather, hip hop) music and culture, both of which are as much a part of the contemporary meaning of blackness in the West as was Martin Luther King or the Black Panther movement in Reed's day.[348] Moreover, it is unlikely that that resemblance is coincidental, for the Chav, we are told, possesses a particular fondness for hip hop, and so it is by no means unreasonable to suggest that the image that these young men are so readily adopting may be just as much one of blackness as of chaviness.[349] Nevertheless, one cannot consider these images as bearing evidence of cross-racial mimesis without acknowledging that afore-mentioned 'missing detail:' and that is precisely what the 'Chavscum' site – the archetypal 'mouthpiece of the masses' – refuses to do. Granted, it acknowledges the Chav's fondness for hip-hop, but it also neglects to identify hip hop and its images as having anything to do with blackness: and with very good reason.[350] For whilst it is one thing to inhabit the 'gangsta' image 'legitimately' – i.e., to be a 'gangsta' rapper, or at least to be black – it is quite another

[348]Annette Saddik, J, "Rap's Unruly Body: The Postmodern Performance of Black Male Identity on the American Stage," *The Drama Review* 47, no. 4 (2003):122. Saddik describes how one of the things that defines the "gangsta pose" is the self-conscious display of wealth through "copious gold jewellery, bright colours, [and] fast cars," (114); note the similarity of that list to the one I gave earlier for the 'chav's' defining characteristics. Moreover, as the article's title suggests, she highlights the way in which 'blackness,' and the performance of 'blackness,' is central to 'gangsta' rap's content and delivery, meaning the 'chav' performs 'blackness' by proxy. The Black Panther movement was (and still is) a progressive political body whose aggressive tactics in the fight for 'black' rights during the 1960's earned them an infamy for which they are remembered to this day.

[349] See: 'How to Spot a Chav,' www.chavscum.co.uk: (op.cit.).

[350] This goes back to my earlier comment about disavowal, of which I will say more in a moment.

to inhabit the 'gangsta' image *without* the appropriate racial qualifications to do so. To come to the point then, it is not so much the presence of blackness in these images that finally casts the Chav in the role of cross-racial mimetic, but the presence of blackness alongside one other marker of identity: one whose own presence (if my own investigations into literally dozens of these images are anything to go by) seems, in every instance, a given. Namely: epidermal whiteness, or white skin.

Marking the Chav figure as definitively white (a premise that applies equally to the wannabe, for it too is conspicuous in its whiteness) launches it into new territory, and opens up new difficulties.[351] Whereas before we were able to think of the type as part of a general youth trend, to snigger along with its wholesale mocking in the popular culture, suddenly we are faced with the proposition that the Chav is a *racial,* as well as a masculine type, that it *says something* about the current status of traditional models of white masculinity among the British youth, and worst of all, that in laughing along to all those Chav jokes, we may even have been being *racist*. It is, I believe, the desire to avoid such difficulties that has helped to shape the Chav into what I referred to earlier as a figure of disavowal, since what it offers is a frame of reference for what is, after all, an actual social type – walk the length of any British High street and you will see what I mean – *without* having to acknowledge that type as having the slightest thing to do with race. Consequently, the 'Chavscum' Webmaster, for example, is able to reconcile a claim such as "Chavs can be Asian and black too," with the fact that the many images of Chavs on his own website quite clearly suggest otherwise.[352] This may in part explain precisely why the Chav concept, and particularly the word 'Chav' itself, seemed to strike such a chord with the British public upon its first emergence, since there is a great deal more at stake in such a possibility than the mere avoidance of social awkwardness. The alternative – and there is such a figure within the British social framework: the 'Wigger' – forces us to confront the notion that an increasing number of our young white men are apparently finding their masculine role models, not among the powerful white men who still occupy the upper tiers in the scale of hegemony, but among those, who within the no less intact system of race, would be deemed to be their Others. In other words, by equipping ourselves with the label Chav, we (that is, the

[351] I should, however, point out that owing to his Jewish descent, the premise (i.e., that the 'chav' and 'wannabe' are 'white,' and 'white' alone) does not extend quite so easily to Reed himself, for as was discussed in the previous chapter, historically, the Jewish subject's relationship to, and inclusion within the 'white race' is one that has been both fraught with problems, and subject to almost continual change.
[352] Interview, qtd. by Bennet (op.cit.).

white majority) have been able to turn a 'blind eye,' linguistically speaking, on what would otherwise have been an all too apparent truth in today's 'multi-cultural' Britain: namely, that many of our young white men appear to be of much the same mind as Reed when it comes to the matter of racial identity. That is to say, they too 'wanna be other.'

To recap then, it would seem that the emergence of the Chav figure speaks primarily of three things: firstly, a growing investment in Mercer's 'certain attitude' (i.e. the tendency to equate the Other with 'coolness;') secondly, a growing sense of dissatisfaction in what traditional models of white masculinity have to offer in return; and thirdly, a general desire to avoid having to face up to what either of these developments might mean within a wider social, and particularly racial, context. Of the three, it is the latter that I believe to be the most relevant for the present moment, since the idea of a notionally white subject who 'acts,' or wants/believes themselves to *be* black or other is hardly a new one in British culture, and this (extremely sudden) shift in attitude therefore hints at other changes – perhaps in respect of the racial *status quo* – having taken place. As I have mentioned above, precedent for such a figure comes in the form of the 'wigger,' an older, but still relatively recent term (David Roediger traces its roots in the US context back to the early 1970's, and the word has been in use for a similar length of time here in the UK) whose meaning, I fear, is all too obvious.[353] It has never before been thought necessary to challenge this notion in anything like as comprehensive a fashion as the 'Chav' phenomenon has done – in short, something must have changed.

There could of course be many reasons for this besides a change in the racial *status quo*, however. The English language is, after all, constantly evolving, and fashions in speech have a tendency to alter over time. Similarly, the much resented, but nevertheless inescapable pressures of a misguided 'political correctness' could be responsible, as if the word chav' – since it does not, like 'wigger,' share any association with the dreaded 'N' word – were somehow less offensive, or revealing of one's prejudices.[354] Bearing in mind, however, that a central part of the 'chav' notion is that its ranks are ever increasing in number, I would suggest that there is good reason to

[353] David R. Roediger, "Guineas, Wiggers, and the Dramas of Racialized Culture," *American Literary History* 7.4 (1995): 660.

[354] Never mind that common consensus regarding the word 'Chav' is that has three possible derivations, and that two of these—the Romany words 'charvo,' meaning 'boy,' and 'charver,' meaning 'woman'—given the Romany's treatment in contemporary Britain, cast as long a shadow of prejudice over the word as 'nigger' does in the case of 'wigger.' (Allen,op.cit.: 193). See also Bennet (op.cit.).

suspect that this reluctance to see the 'chav' as representative of either 'whiteness' or 'otherness' – or indeed, of both – is all too real. After all, in Reed's day the 'wannabe' was a *marginal* figure, and this was also true of the 'wigger' (though perhaps to a lesser extent), a fact that may have made them easier to deal with, easier to overlook. The idea, however, that those who by any normal standards would be our young white men, are, in their droves, turning their backs on 'whiteness' in favour of something else, something 'other,' is a challenging one, and one which is likely to be received by the majority (read: 'white' majority) of the British population with shrieks of horror, and of disbelief. Because such a scenario would not just say something about the current status of 'white' masculinity, but of 'whiteness' itself; indeed, it may even succeed in doing what generations of racial theorists, campaigners, and activists have failed to do: undermine the very notion of *'white' racial privilege*. Considering all that I have said on the subject of the 'Chav' and their capacity to blank out considerations of race, therefore, is it really surprising that contemporary Britain is now – in the words of tabloid journalist Stewart Wittingham – a "Chav nation[?]"[355]

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You may be wondering at this point just what all this has to do with masculine crisis, let alone British cinema. As I have been arguing throughout this thesis, white racial privilege is vital to the consideration of masculine crisis, precisely because the categories of race and gender are so intertwined in experiential terms, that when it is a white male whose masculine crisis is being discussed, he *must* be framed within the discourses of both: that is, treated like a white man, and not just *a* man. Indeed, it is no coincidence that the call to study whiteness was first issued *by* ('non-white') theorists of gender (albeit that they were feminists, and not 'masculinists'), since as Jane Gaines so rightly states (in relation to the female case): "By taking gender as its starting point, feminist theory helps to reinforce white middle-class values, and to the extent that it works to keep women from seeing other structures of oppression, it functions ideologically."[356] Put simply: by ignoring whiteness in the study of masculine crisis, we actively encourage, and participate in, the perpetuation of white racial privilege – and insofar as the notion of privilege, by its very nature, goes against that of crisis, such an approach is effectively self-negating. As the previous chapters have shown, that is not

[355] (Wittingham, op.cit.), emphasis added.
[356] Jane Gaines, "Whiteness Studies and Looking Relations: Race and Gender in Feminist Film Theory," *Screen* 29, no. 4 (1988): 13.

to say that white men are in some way 'immune' to masculine crisis (the reality would seem quite the opposite if contemporary British Cinema is anything to go by), simply that whiteness and white racial privilege have, up to now, always been there, lurking in the background, exercising their so-called 'invisible' hand of influence. The question that this chapter is trying to answer, however, is whether or not a precedent exists for an experience of masculine crisis in which whiteness is not just the setting for the crisis, but an intimate part of it: and that of course necessitates an experience of whiteness that discounts, or undermines, the effects of white racial privilege. The possibility that the Chav may provide such a precedent is, therefore, a significant one: not just within the context of this chapter, but also for this thesis as a whole.

So what about British Cinema? Well, the 'Chav' is only a small part in the much larger story of British racial relations: one whose influence comes to a rather abrupt halt when traced no further back than the early part of 2004. The significance of this fact cannot be overemphasised, because (assuming that the situation described in the penultimate paragraph did not simply occur due to some overnight surge on new year's eve 2003) this leaves a span of years prior to this moment – say, from the mid to late Nineties onward – during which the wannabe type model of behaviour was becoming more and more common as an identity choice among our young white men, but at the same time no less able to carry on representing whiteness. The fact that this period coincides exactly with that which is of most interest to this thesis will doubtless not go unnoticed, and to the extent that the Chav is essentially the product of the preceding situation in racial relations, it therefore provides a useful means by which one can situate the film texts of contemporary British cinema in their appropriate context.

Returning to the above premise then (i.e., that in the immediate run-up to the Chav's emergence, the wannabe was both an increasingly common, and yet recognisably white, figure); the point to be emphasised is that such a scenario, although unproven, would in fact give further explanation to the rapid uptake of the word 'Chav' once it *had* entered the frame, since this would be the inevitable reaction of a nation that had had to live for some time with an increasingly uncomforting presence. And that is precisely what I am suggesting was the case here, for the truth is that before the 'Chav' arrived, types such as the 'wannabe' and the 'wigger,' types which, if the above line of reasoning has any validity at all, *also* undermine the notion of 'white' racial privilege, existed as more or less unchallenged (albeit disapproved of) features on the racial map of contemporary Britain. This too is hugely significant, in that it suggests that the

'wannabe's' growing pervasiveness may have been *felt* by the majority of the British population as an increasingly bigger threat to the notion of 'white' racial privilege. More than that even, it suggests that a 'truism' exists concerning the 'white' subject, and particularly the 'white' male, which *allows* for a certain tendency to be affected by cross-racial mimetic desire, and that it was only when a particular proportion of young 'white' males were seeming to succumb to that tendency that it became necessary to attempt to dispel that 'truism:' hence, the birth of the 'Chav.'[357]

This leaves us with many unanswered questions. For instance, if ostensibly white men are indeed busy going round turning their backs on whiteness and remodelling themselves in their 'other's' image (and as the Chav's emergence demonstrates, *something* at least appears to be going on with the white male of today), then just where does this leave the notion of white racial privilege? Moreover, what can one make of the fact that we seem to actually *expect* a certain number of white men to behave in this way, albeit that that number has apparently now been surpassed? In the sense that it speaks of a belief that 'otherness' is in some way preferable to their existing identity, should the white male's 'want-to-be-other' be interpreted as a disavowal of racial privilege (inasmuch as it challenges the notion that in the hierarchy of privileged identities, theirs is already pretty much 'as good as it gets')? How could this be the case if such a 'want' is in the first instance a *function of* that very same privilege (for one thing that is certain is that the want-to-be-Other first necessitates a firm and assured belief that one is most certainly *not* Other to begin with)? Furthermore, how can this scenario be reconciled with the scene of contemporary racial politics in the UK? Whilst Lou Reed's cry of "I Wanna be black, have natural rhythm/Shoot twenty foot of jism too/And fuck up the Jews" seems somehow fitting of the 1970's (after all, this was an era of profound contradiction in all areas of Western racial politics, equally notable for its advances in racial equality as for the arrival of 'blaxploitation' cinema), it nevertheless seems to fly in the face of today's ideals of a 'multicultural Britain.'[358] If the contemporary racial scene in the UK is indeed one of 'acceptance,' 'progressiveness,' and 'diversity' as we are told, then this might allow for

[357]Gayle Wald, "One of the Boys? Whiteness, Gender and Popular Music Studies," in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, ed. Mike Hill (New York: New York University Publishers, 1997): 160.

[358] 'Blaxploitation' is a term used to describe a group of Hollywood films that adopted a particular aesthetic characterised by its exploitative use of the African American image. Ed Guerro dates the "blaxploitation period" to the years 1969-1974, and in many respects, therefore, these films mark a starting point in the systematic exploitation of the black image that has continued more or less unabated to the present day. Ed Guerrero, "Black Violence as Cinema: From Cheap Thrills to Historical Agonies," in *Violence and American Cinema*, ed. J. David Slocum (New York, London: Routledge, 2001): 213.

some explanation of a 'want-to-be-other,' yet if such a want is to be couched in terms such as Reed's language suggests (inasmuch as the emphasis is on exploitation over collaboration), then it can hardly be said to gel easily with such idealistic principles. Further still, thinking back to Gormley's assessment of Tarantino's films, what does it say about how the 'white' male views his Others that it should be such 'typed' markers of identity as 'black' speech that are deemed desirous of imitation, or that as Mercer stated, considerations such as fashion and hairstyle might just as easily have been chosen instead? Doesn't this highlight a particular fascination with the *visual* register of difference, with 'surface' affects, and if so, do we therefore take it that the most important visual 'marker' of identity – epidermal hue – somehow also has its place in that list of the white male's various 'wants?' And most importantly, if an uncontested whiteness really always means racial privilege, and if racial privilege really always means unconditional benefit, then just what, precisely, is it that motivates the white male to 'want-to-be-'other' in the first instance? In other words, if I might add a slight change of emphasis to the question succinctly posed by Kobena Mercer in relation just one of the many such 'wants:' "what is it about *whiteness* that makes the white subject want to be black?"[359]

It is in attempting to answer such questions that the subsequent sections of this chapter will be focused; yet before proceeding to interrogate any notion as firmly established and amply substantiated as white racial privilege, it is of course first necessary to sound a clear note of caution. As Richard Dyer noted at the opening of his own pioneering study of whiteness, the danger of such an enterprise is that one's argument should be reduced to a petty "me-too-ism," whereby the spoilt denizens of white racial privilege simply cannot bear the thought of being left out of the discussion of oppressed social groupings, and thus feel the need to forcibly declare: 'we're all victims too.'[360] Whilst then it should be stressed that I am by no means disputing that white racial privilege both has had, and continues to have, a profound impact on the structuring of social difference (the very function of which, needless to say, serves to perpetuate racial oppression), I am nevertheless suggesting that the monolithic way in which it is usually approached does little to aid its understanding. By better comprehending the configuration of white racial privilege, what it encompasses and more importantly, where its limits lie, the more that can be done to reduce its impact,

[359] (Mercer (1994), op.cit.: 197), emphasis added.
[360] Dyer, *White* 10.

and ultimately, to eradicate it altogether. Similarly, inasmuch as the early emphasis is to be on instances in which white male adopts the role of cross-racial mimetic, it should not be assumed that I am in any way attempting to simply rearticulate the same old tired notions of the 'other' as somehow less 'affected', more 'authentic' – which, in any case, is just another way of saying that the 'other' is closer to nature: namely, less human. Rather, in choosing this emphasis, I am hoping to discover not what such instances can tell us about some stereotypical 'allure of the other,' but about the lived reality of white masculinity itself. This, along with the chance to gain a better understanding of how white racial privilege functions at the level of identity, is reason enough not to let the potential for criticism deter one from asking what might be difficult questions.

Ultimately, however, as far as both my own interests and those of this thesis are concerned, by far and away the most important reason why these issues not only should, but *must* be investigated, could perhaps find no better demonstration than the Chav figure's current pervasiveness in British popular culture. To reiterate: *something* is going on with white masculinity in the UK today, and as a virtual barometer for the cultural temper, that 'something' has by no means escaped the notice of the British film industry. Through looking at a whole range of films, some hugely successful, others less so, the remaining sections of this chapter will trace the impact of these issues in the very fabric of British cinema itself, examining both what they might mean for whiteness, and more importantly, what they might mean for the ostensibly privileged, yet ostensibly beleaguered, British white male.

4.2) White Dreads: Explicit Cross-racial Mimesis in *Shopping*, *Human Traffic*, and *Ali G in Da House*

> "The man who adores the Negro is as "sick" as the man who abominates him."
> — Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*.[361]

It is not necessary to delve very far into British Cinema's output from the period that is of interest to this thesis (i.e.: 1994 onwards) before the first effects of 'cross racial mimesis' become discernible in specific film texts. This is especially the case for what I termed, in the introductory section, its 'explicit' forms, or manifestations, since by the time these first made their mark – in Paul W. S Anderson's *Shopping* (1994) –

[361] Frantz Fanon, *Black Sin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967): 8.

the likes of 'Cool Britannia,' 'Brit Pop,' and of course, 'the British Film Revival,' were still relatively unheard of terms.[362] Anderson's film, an unusual co-production between the UK and Japan, was a comprehensive failure in terms of box office takings (which just broke the £100,000 mark), and without being unduly unfair, it is not difficult to see why. Its portrayal of disenfranchised youth and the search to find a place in a society that neither wants you, nor you it, played out against a backdrop of violence and adrenaline-fuelled criminality, and set amongst the post-industrial degradation of a British city in the near future, owes much in terms of its tone and aesthetics to Stanley Kubrick's masterful *Clockwork Orange* (1971), though it has none of that film's originality and sophistication.[363] *Shopping*'s approach to colour, in particular, is disarmingly reductive, and mirrors the two-dimensionality of the 'Manichean dualism' that has attracted such criticism from racial theorists at home and abroad. In this film, one is either white, and has legitimate access to society's privileges (the most important of which – unsurprisingly, considering the film's title – is the right to be a consumer), or one is black, and has to take what one wants by force.[364]

Interestingly however, for the film, it would seem that these categories do not *necessarily* have to have anything to do with 'race' as it is conventionally understood (that is, as being the inevitable result of one's epidermal hue): as is made abundantly clear during one scene in particular. The plot line running up to this scene is fairly straightforward. Newly released from prison, Billy (a youthful Jude Law) is soon reunited with his friends, and, more out of boredom and a sense of disenfranchisement than any real desire to make a profit, is drawn back into the world of 'ram-raiding:' the practice of utilising vehicles (one big and heavy; one fast and responsive) as a means of both gaining access to, and escaping from, a shop or place of business with the aim of stealing its contents and escaping un-captured. A series of scenes depicting high-speed car chases ensues, as Billy and his friends become involved in a power struggle with their enemies (on both sides of the law), which culminates in an attempt by Billy to prove that he is 'the best' by 'hitting' a never-before-attempted target – a Shopping Mall of proportions sufficient to have inspired Frederick Jameson's memorable

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[362] *Shopping*. (P. J. Anderson, Channel Four Films/Impact/Kuzui Enterprises/Polygram Filmed Entertainment/WMG Film, UK/Japan, 1994). I would like to emphasise that even though the term 'British film revival' may have been relatively unheard of at the time of the film's release, it should nevertheless be considered as belonging to the category of films that spawned this term, albeit that it can only be seen as so retrospectively.

[363] *Clockwork Orange*. (Stanley Kubrick, Hawk Films Ltd./Polaris Productions/Warner Bros. Pictures, UK, 1971).

[364] I will discuss this aspect of the film further in due course.

ruminations on the disorienting nature of postmodern spaces.[365] The actual scene in question occurs in the moments just prior to this 'hit,' and focuses not on Billy, but on two of his friends: Monkey (Danny Newman), and Be-Bop (Fraser James), the film's only non-white character, and on a single exchange between them. Sat in a car contemplating their ultimate prize, the dazzling lights of the mall shining out in the night sky like so many candle-flames to these moths, Monkey, for the benefit of the CCTV cameras, dons a latex Michael Mask (fig.1, below) and, shrieking and striking a pose in an imitation of his idol (the "king of pop," he opines), declares, direct to camera: "I always wanted to be black." In reply, Be-Bop, whose role in the film is, not for the first time, reduced here to that of representing literal, or 'authentic' (meaning epidermal) blackness, simply states, in scornful tones: "Dream on, man."

Fig. 1

The tensions implicit in this brief exchange over what it means to be white, what it means to be black, and what it means to want to cross that long-lived, but by no means timeless line in ideology and lived experience that divides the two, are precisely those entailed when cross-racial mimetic desire goes beyond the admiration of one's other from afar. As Be-Bop's response makes clear, Monkey's declaration is not so much an expression of wanting as it is, for him at least, a statement of satisfaction at a

[365] Frederick Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146 (1984): 52-92.

dream realised, the phrase 'I always *wanted* to be black' implying that that wanting is in the past, that Monkey, by *quite literally* donning (a) blackface, now *is* black (albeit that the suggestion is that Be-Bop considers that blackness to be inauthentic). In discussing reactions among white men to 'affirmative action' policies in the US, the theorist David Wellman refers to blackface minstrelry, commenting that there is a "new minstrelry" at work in the US of today.[366] Monkey might also be thought of in this way, since 'Otherness' is, by a single stroke, reduced to a 'mask' that one can put on or take off at will, an 'optional extra' that bestows upon its bearer a set of 'extra' qualities that are pre-determined in the white racial imagination. This is precisely what I mean by the term 'explicit' cross-racial mimesis:' it is the actual *taking on* of blackness or Otherness in an explicit, or material, form – the acting out of the fantasies of cross-racial mimetic desire. Comparing this scene with Reed's 'I Wanna Be Black,' several differences are immediately apparent. Firstly, and most obviously, Reed's wannabes 'want' to be black, Monkey 'wanted:' one is the expression of the desire; the other is its realisation. The major difference, however, is in *Shopping*'s altogether lighter handed approach to this whole issue. As was discussed earlier, Reed's song was parodic, the sheer vulgarity of its lyrics (among which 'jism,' 'whores' and 'fuck' stand out as particularly apt examples), plus its tasteless references to the assassinations of the black political figures Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, suggest that Reed was harshly critical of such conceptions of Otherness, that his intention was to 'tell it like it is,' no matter how ugly a picture that telling produced. *Shopping*, on the other hand, positions Monkey as childishly naïve throughout the film (he is seen gazing at babies' toys in a shop window on one occasion, and with an enormous glass of milkshake on another) and thus his 'wanting to be black' is likely to be interpreted within the context of that naivety: that is, seen as innocent, rather than inherently racist. Indeed, the fact that both characters die in the following scene reinforces such a reading, since it ensures that Monkey – now a figure of pathos – is more likely to incite sadness (at a childhood lost) than censure (at having held a contentious racial view).

So whose approach is the correct one? Does Monkey's character, or rather, *Shopping*, deserve censure for its stance on race? My immediate response, given the political nature of all his music, is to side with Reed on this matter; but that may be to

[366] David Wellman, "Minstrel Shows, Affirmative Action Talk, and Angry White Men: Making Otherness in the 1990's," in *Displacing Whiteness*, ed. Ruth Frankenberg (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999): 313.

judge *Shopping* (and those white men who actually engage in cross-racial mimesis) prematurely. As I have mentioned, Monkey's newly acquired 'blackness' is to a certain extent undermined in the scene by Beepop's response to it (which centres on the question of its authenticity), and one could also say that the choice of black symbol – i.e. the Michael Jackson mask, or Michael Jackson himself – undermines it further, since Jackson's blackness is so problematic in itself.[367] Ultimately, however, it is impossible to say precisely *what* blackness stands for in this scene, since all that is really clear is that it has a different meaning, and form, here than it has had throughout the rest of the film. This, by contrast, keeps things black and white – quite literally – albeit that those categories are represented as being more the result of one's social standing (translated in the film as spending power) than skin colour. One scene in particular comes to mind here: that in which Billy and his friends reconnoitre the shopping Mall prior to the 'hit.' As the scene begins, a jump-cut instantly propels the spectator from the dark and decaying surroundings of Billy's inauspicious new hang-out – a derelict train shed housing a graffiti-strewn steam locomotive (symbolising, presumably, a long-dead age of industry) – to the dazzling interior of 'Retail-Land:' an ethereal space of brightness, opulence, and above all, consumption.[368] The initial shot (Fig. 2, overleaf) floods the screen with a blinding white light that disorientates the viewer, an effect that is heightened by the sudden alteration in exposure settings, which throughout the scene are increased several stops to create a bleached, over-exposed look. The sound also adds to the disorientating effect; the sudden commencement of Motzart's 'Eine Kleine Nacht Musik' providing a stark contrast to the industrial techno that predominates during the rest of the film.[369] It is only as the camera pans down that the spectator can begin to mentally 'map' the space: we realise that the camera has been focused vertically upwards upon the brightly-lit domed ceiling; we see the source of the music (a string quartet), the galleries, the marbled floors, the columns, and the elegantly sweeping staircases. The phrase 'Cathedral of commercial culture' could not be more

[367] I do not intend to enter into the debate about Jackson's blackness here, but it suffices to say that it is extremely unlikely that the film's makers would have used this particular sign of blackness without being fully aware of its range of connotations in popular culture.

[368] Billy's motivation to pull off the ultimate 'hit' is explicitly framed in this scene (that is, the one set in the train-shed) in terms of masculine rivalry with his criminal nemesis Tommy. Billy talks about "showing Tommy;" to which Jo, his closest friend and love-interest, disdainfully remarks: "You and Tommy should just get your dicks out and see whose is the biggest." That penile size is commonly thought to be an indicator of one's level of masculinity need hardly be mentioned.

[369] (Note to self and RM: appropriate citation required).

appropriately applied than to this very space, since its entire look says "this is where one's dreams can be made reality" – provided, that is, that one's credit is sound.

What is patently obvious, however, is that Billy and his friends do not belong in a place like this precisely because they *cannot* afford their dreams, and this is symbolised in the scene in two distinct ways. Firstly, as the scene evolves, we see a

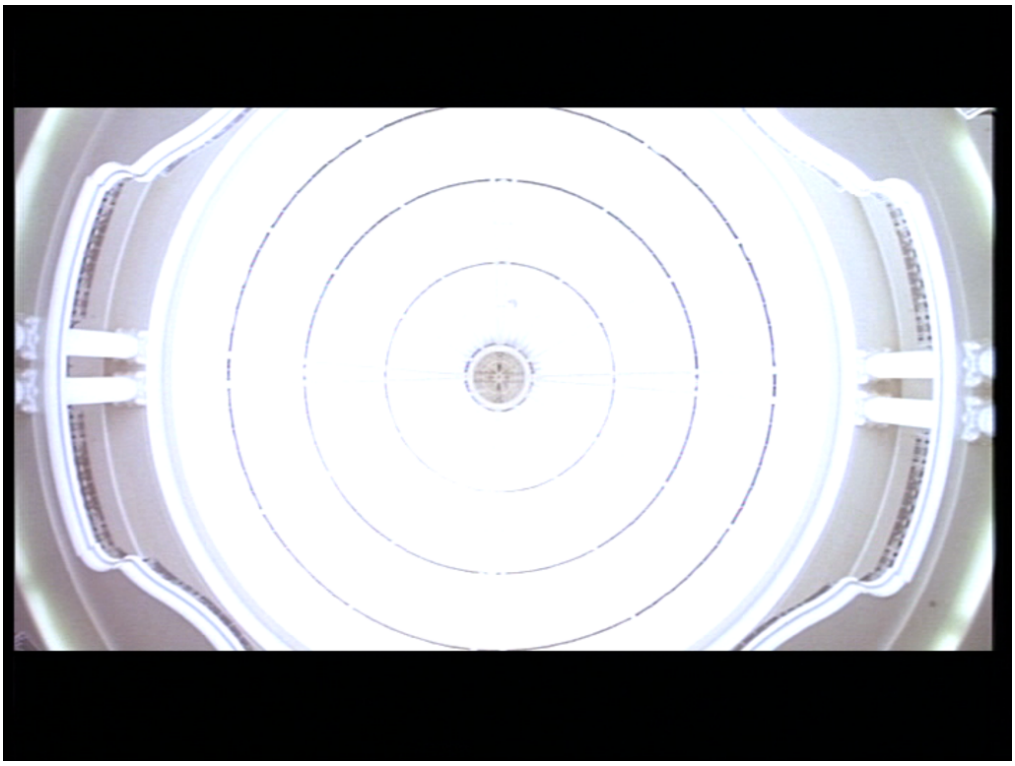

Fig. 2

montage of shots depicting each of the characters gazing through shop windows at items that signify those things with which each character is associated in the film: an obvious means of representing a lack of capital. More interesting, however, is the role that dress plays in the scene, since there is a very clear line drawn in these terms between Billy and his friends and the genuine shoppers. I recall a moment in a film studies lecture some years ago in which the convening professor commented on the simplistic use of colour symbolism in the Western genre, whereby the good guy wears a white hat, and the bad guy wears a black hat.[370] There is a similar simplicity to the colour symbolism in this scene, with the shoppers (several of whom are non-white) being dressed largely in very light colours, and the film's characters being dressed largely in dark colours (Fig. 3, overleaf). The spectator gains some clue as to what this means in an earlier scene, as Billy's rival gang-leader, Tommy (Sean Pertwee), attempts to impress Jo (Sadie Frost), Billy's closest friend and love interest, with the unprejudiced way in

[370] (Note to RM: I'm not sure if this requires referencing, but it was you who made this comment).

which he runs his criminal enterprise. "You know what it's like" he comments, "the shops, yeah, they think we're all scum. No one gives you credit, no one rents to you. Not me. I Supply. These little people, they can't live without me." In other words, there is an 'us and them' logic at work in *Shopping*, whereby each of the principle

Fig. 3

characters, and the entire criminal subculture to which they belong, is represented as Other to mainstream commercial society: a space that whiteness (although not necessarily in its epidermal sense) occupies by default. Otherness is effectively lifted free of its bonds with skin colour, and turned into something that is more related to the hegemonic, than the racial, hierarchy.

David Roediger's work is again relevant here, since in a different text to that referred to previously, he provides reason to believe that such an outlook on Otherness (or more specifically, blackness) may be a recognisable characteristic of British society. He notes: "In 1984, when we lived in the London Borough of Brent, immigrants and descendants of immigrants of many nationalities called themselves 'Blacks' because that 'racial' category came close to becoming a (…) 'political color of the oppressed.'"[371] Kobena Mercer, along with Isaac Julien, refers to this same state of affairs, describing it in the following terms: "[it was] a re-articulation of the category

[371] David R. Roediger, *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics and Working Class History* (London, New York: Verso, 1994): 4.

'black' as a political term of identification among diverse minority communities of Asian, African and Caribbean origin, rather than as a biological or 'racial' category."[372] Although neither of these instances actually mention whiteness as being included in this 'brotherhood of the dispossessed,' is it perhaps not unreasonable to suggest that in certain situations, a white person might be admissible to that position, *if* they happen to suffer the same kind of ill-treatment at the hands of hegemonic society?[373] Could this therefore explain Monkey's, and the cross-racial mimetic's, desire to be black? Moreover, might it also not be unreasonable to suggest that if blackness can in certain situations be altered from a racial, to a political, identity, could the same not be possible – in reverse – for whiteness? After all, if it *were* stripped of its racial, or biological basis (which, as I have said many times throughout this thesis, is a complete fabrication) whiteness might finally be seen for what it really is: an identity that is from the *very beginning* political, to the extent that 'political' can be understood to mean *ideological*. This forgiving view of *Shopping*'s outlook on Otherness is, however, still somewhat at odds with the scene in which Monkey adopts the role of (explicit) cross-racial mimetic, and it should not be forgotten that Otherness is still associated in the film with criminality. Ultimately, therefore, its stance on the issue of race *per se*, is best described as one of ambivalence.

Another British film that manifests the effects of explicit cross-racial mimesis is Justin Kerrigan's *Human Traffic* (1999): an affectionate portrait of club culture (and the attendant drug culture) at the turn of the millennium.[374] Kerrigan's film, not dissimilar in structure to the classic *Saturday Night Fever* (1977) – which, in itself, is similar to that of the earlier *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960) – follows a group of friends through their various alcohol/drug-fuelled, night-time adventures.[375] It is in their day-time lives that the friends are shown to encounter the cross-racial mimetic, however, which immediately gives an indication of the fact that this figure receives an altogether more scathing depiction in this film than it received in *Shopping* (inasmuch as it is the night-time life that is associated with excitement and 'real' life, whereas the

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[372] Isaac Julien, and Kobena Mercer, "Introduction: De Margin and De Centre," *Screen* 29, no. 4 (1988): 3.

[373] This particular sense of 'white otherness' is also represented in another British film—Gary Oldman's hard-hitting accomplished *Nil by Mouth*—when one of the principal characters responds "what am I, black?" to a minor slight from another character that leaves the first feeling deprived. See: *Nil by Mouth* (Gary Oldman, SE8 Group/Euoropa Corp., UK/France, 1997).

[374] *Human Traffic* (Justin Kerrigan, Irish Screen/Fruit Salad Films, UK/Ireland, 1999).

[375] *Saturday Night Fever* (John Badham, Robert Stigwood Orgnaization, US, 1977). *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (Karel Reisz, Woodfal Film Productions, UK, 1960).

day-time one is dull, inauthentic, and endured only because it provides the means for the former: the weekly pay-packet). There are in fact *several* cross-racial mimetics, or 'black/white men,' in *Human* Traffic, of two distinct varieties, and one cannot help wondering if this increase (i.e. from a single character and instance in *Shopping*, to a range of characters and instances here) might have anything to do with the kind of upsurge in this figure's pervasiveness about which I conjectured in this chapter's introduction. Our first encounter is with Matt and Luke (Peter Bramhill and Patrick Taggart), two minor characters from outside the circle of friends, referred to in the dialogue as the "designer-porn white-boy dread posse" (Fig. 4, below). Their introduction occurs only a few minutes into the film, and as in all the opening scenes, is accompanied by a voice–over commentary that sums up their outlook on race as being that of "blackness is a state of mind, ya." This mirrors the same idea of racial non-fixity as was seen in *Shopping*, whereby Otherness is suggested to be 'up for grabs,' as being just one more adoptable subject position among many. And adopt it they clearly have, for both characters sport dreadlock hairstyles (which Mercer has described as symbolic of the *artifice* of black styles, rather than their inherent, or 'natural' coolness) and use 'black' slang (albeit that it comes across as far from authentic).[376] The explicit cross-racial mimetic is advanced one step further in this film, since unlike Monkey, who required a literal mask to 'become' black, Matt and Luke have no such need, since they have each transformed their *own bodies* into a mask of blackface. However, that the film takes a withering view of the resulting black performance is made abundantly clear: the scene cross-cuts between a head and torso shot of the pair, and one of a hairy male posterior complete with a smouldering cigarette stuck in its crack (the latter being the imagined image of their interlocutor). (Fig, 5, overleaf). The implication is obvious: when the explicit cross-racial mimetic claims to possess, or to be in tune with blackness, he is speaking out of his…well, you get the idea.

We have established then, that the explicit cross-racial mimetic has made its mark on contemporary British cinema, even though it is not yet clear how this figure could be said to undermine white racial privilege. This becomes much clearer once its second form is introduced in *Human Traffic*. This not even minor character, unnamed in the film but listed in the credits as hip-hop junkie (Tyrone Johnson), is also introduced early on in the sequence of events (in fact, in the very next scene to that just

[376] (Note to self and RM: appropriate citation of Mercer's 'Black hair' chapter from *Welcome to the Jungle)*.

described), and is accompanied by a similar voice-over commentary. As was the case in *Shopping*, this figure is juxtaposed with the film's only non-white character – record store worker Koop (Sean Parks) – who, quite significantly, is described in the commentary as a "serious vinyl-pusher: blagging friendship, getting the kids hooked,

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

hustling with style." The implication here is that the character in question *is* such a 'hooked kid' (hooked, that is, on the consumption of black culture, and blackness itself, as he imagines these things), as is signified immediately by his mode of dress: which,

incidentally, is very similar to that referred to previously in respect of the Chav's appropriation of certain elements of the 'gangsta pose' (Fig. 6, overleaf). As the scene progresses, this implication is emphasised, since his accent – an affected approximation of so-called 'black speech' – plus his actual language use, speaks of the great lengths to which he has gone to transform himself into as complete a vision of the way that he perceives blackness to be as possible. However, that this is a *mis-perception* is made clear, since this manner of speaking bears no relation at all to the way that Koop (the 'genuinely' black character) actually speaks. The scene continues through portraying a seemingly insignificant event, the likes of which might be witnessed today in any record-sore throughout the land: the white male's purchase of a hip-hop album. However, what is particularly interesting about *this* scene is the way that Koop manages to persuade this character to part with what is suggested to be an extortionate price for the album. Koop does this by selling the album on certain grounds: he tells him that it was "recorded by a posse of crack-heads on Death-Row" called "the Itchy-Trigger-Finger-Niggers;" that in the same way that "the price of an artist's work goes up when they die," so too do "the price of hip-hop albums go up when the gangsta gets locked down;" and that "when they get the chair the price'll go through the roof!" With the final warning that if he fails to act, the album will either "be banned" or "some other hip-hop junkie" will beat him to it, *this* hip-hop junkie is powerless to resist. Such comments are extremely revealing, since not only do they tell us precisely what the attractions of blackness and black culture are for the cross-racial mimetic, but also that the consumption (and in the explicit mimetic's case, the assimilation) of these things, is not so much a choice for them as it is a compulsion, a *need*.

Fig. 6

Thinking back to our earlier discussion of Paul Gormely's work, this seems reminiscent of the need that blackness was asked to fulfil in respect of the lost affective potential of mainstream American cinema by the new-brutality film. Gormley's comments regarding the physical shock that was elicited in the body of the white spectator by the images of black male bodies (and black male violence) contained in the films of New Black realism apply well here, since it was, as Gormley acknowledged, the 'itchy trigger fingers' of those particular black men, and their real-life counterparts, that made for much of that response.[377] As Gormley states: New Black realism's affective power resulted from "the immediate anxieties and paranoia historically produced in the white cultural imagination by images of 'dangerous' black [male] bodies."[378] Needless to say, the white paranoia to which Gormley refers here is precisely the same as that discussed at length in the previous chapter; the tendency to see the black male as possessing a power beyond what the white male could match: the

[377] In his book, Gormley disusses the opening scene of *Menace II Society*, in which the black gangsta character O'Dog shoots a shopkeeper and his wife—and steals their takings—for virtually no reason at all. This sequence of events horrifies his accompanying friend Caine, who remarks (also in voice-over, incidentally): "went into the store to get a beer – came out an accessory to murder and armed robbery. It was funny like that in the hood sometimes…you never knew what was gonna happen and when." As Gormley comments, "the 'hood is a world where (…) meaningless violence is a common occurrence," and it is the fear of such black violence that a group name like "The Itchy-Trigger-Finger-Niggers" plays on. (Gormley, op,cit.: 115).

[378] (Gormley, op.cit.: 74).

same as that which Judith Butler called "the racial disposition of the visible."[379] However, Gormley continues by saying that New Black realism (represented, in this instance, by the film *Boyz N the Hood*) had a secondary response, which was that "it quickly became a 'safe' film for white audiences in the sense that it became a kind of social document which white audiences felt gave them an insight into what black life was really like in the ghetto."[380] In the same way, rap and hip-hop have now become 'safe' musical genres within mainstream British culture in the sense that they *also* provide that insight (albeit that their violent and often misogynistic lyrics invite the same kind of fears about 'copycat' behaviour as well). As this scene proves though, rap and hip-hop are far more than just 'safe' musical genres – they are also extremely popular, especially with white males. As Dalton Conley notes (in relation to the US case): "white kids (…) now buy more rap music than any other group."[381] Remembering the assertion that the Chav (who, you will recall, is particularly partial to hip-hop music) is now rife in contemporary Britain, one might suggest that this statement be extended to include the British case on the strength of the Chav's numbers alone. Conley attributes the attraction of rap and hip-hop music to what he calls "the mystique of the ghetto:" the sense that ghetto life (and, might I suggest, black life in general) somehow involves dangers, fears, thrills, and pleasures, that the white male does not have access to directly.[382] As the hip-hop junkie's verdict on hearing the afore-mentioned album suggests – "that shit is *real*, he enthuses – black life is seen as a fuller, more exciting, more *real* life, meaning that whiteness suddenly no longer seems quite such a privileged racial identity.

Such a perception of the differing experiences of black and white male life is borne out in *Human Traffic* in two other ways also. As I have mentioned, Koop is the film's only non-white character, and so it could be said that every other male character can be taken to represent the latter. However, given that it is Koop's best friend Jip (John Simms) who is the film's principal character (it is his voice that is heard on the afore-mentioned commentary; his eyes that events are largely seen through), I would suggest that Jip's experience of white maleness is the most significant in terms of diegetic meaning. Jip is in fact the classic figure of white masculine crisis: his life is

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[379] Judith Butler, "Endangered/Endangering:Schematic Racism and White Paranoia," in *Reading Rodney King Reading Urban Uprising*, ed. R. Gooding-Williams (New York: Routledge, 1993): 18.
[380] (Gormley, op,cit. 74).
[381] Dalton Conley, "Universal Freckle, or How I Learned to Be White," in *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness*, ed. Brigit Brander Rasmussen, Eric Klineberg, Irene J. Nixon, Matt Wray (2001): 27.
[382] (Conley, ibid.)

shown throughout the film to be one of servitude, frustration and inadequacy – this is a man who has been hit hard by the changes in the white male's socio-economic position since the latter part of the twentieth century. For instance, in the opening scene we see him at work (a dead-end job stacking shelves in a warehouse style clothing store): an obvious reference to the switch from a production to a service-led economy, which as we saw in chapter two, is frequently cited as being one of the principle causes of white masculine crisis. Moreover, it is not just in socio-economic terms that Jip is de-masculinised, for throughout most of the film he is wracked with anxieties concerning a recent bout of alcohol and drug-induced impotence: a masculine 'failing' that the white men in the audience are hardly likely to wish to imitate.[383] *Human Traffic*'s message, in other words, is that in contemporary British society, being white and male is by no means a satisfying existence. In contrast, black male life (represented, in this case, by Koop), whilst not without its problems, offers a far more attractive option.[384] Koop is at least successful in his job, and given that he is seen joining in with the customer's dancing at several points, one can only assume that it is not intended to be seen as entirely un-enjoyable.[385] More importantly, however, unlike the white male characters in the film, Koop is in a relationship, and what is significant is that it is with a white girl: a scenario that as I have said previously, is historically proven to incite fears of racial annihilation in the white male. In short, although *Human Traffic* ridicules the explicit cross-racial mimetic, it's vision of the relative attractions of white and black male identity makes it hardly surprising that this is a strategy to which some white males feel compelled to turn.

Returning to the question of white racial privilege then; it would seem that there is some cause to see it as being undermined by explicit manifestations of cross-racial mimesis. Much theory, however, suggests quite the opposite. Gayle Wald, for instance,

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[383] Jip does overcome this problem at the end of the film, but the impression that the white male is somehow more susceptible to this masculine 'problem' than any other male is likely to stand.

[384] Obviously, it is more problematic to suggest that Koop's character is intended to represent blackness as a whole in the film (numerous racial theorists have criticised the 'tokenism' in popular culture for doing just that), but I would argue that it provides us with a reason to believe that to be the case. Some way into the film, the principle characters all visit a large pub together, and after a short preamble, the entire establishment breaks out into song: a new version of the National anthem, with lyrics such as "our gen-er-a-tion, a-li-e-na-tion;" and "i-its haarrd beeinng cooool" (sung to 'land of victorious, happy and glorious;' and 'God save the Queen, respectively). The scene includes a number of overhead shots showing a veritable sea of faces—all of which, excepting Koop's (and one other), appear to be white. Inasmuch as the anthem lyrics imply that this image is meant to be symbolic of British youth as whole, the non-white faces that *are* included have to be considered as symbolic of the youths of minority races also.

[385] Koop is in fact the only character who appears to enjoy his day-time *and* night-time lives (albeit not in equal measure).

in the same article in which she coined the phrase 'cross-racial mimetic desire,' equates "white subjectivity with a social entitlement to experiment with identity:" implying, of course, that non-white subjectivity entails a *lack* of that entitlement.[386] Similarly, Dalton Conley remarks that "it is acceptable for whites to appropriate African American culture, but it is considered "passing" or being an "Uncle Tom" when blacks attempt to adopt white cultural practices in terms of speech, dress, and so on."[387] In a virtually identical comment, David Roediger (discussing blackface minstrelry) notes that "[m]instrels claimed the right to turn Black for as long as they desired and to reappear as white," but "forcefully denied blacks that right, parodying fancy dress, 'l'arned' speech, temperance, and religion as ridiculous attempts to 'act white.'"[388] In an example that relates these issues directly to film, Suzanne Moore points out that "much of our enjoyment of music and films is bound up with experiencing something that is other to our daily lives (…) increasingly black culture is used to signify something radically different;" she goes on to add: "although the insecurity of identity that [such] films offer is pleasurable, it can also be unsettling if security is not restored by the end of the film."[389] It is perhaps for that reason that as Sharon Willis notes: "the threads of cross-racial identification are wound around a white body that remains stable."[390] Eric Lott, in another reference to blackface minstrelry, describes this practice as a "mixed economy of celebration and exploitation."[391] William Solomon, discussing the white subject's identification with blackness, refers to the "affective mixture of attraction and repulsion."[392] And Homi Bhabba, arguably the most well respected of all racial theorists, states that Otherness in general is "at once the object of desire and derision."[393] Put simply, the opinion supported by theory is that the explicit cross-racial mimetic's behaviour is in fact a *function* of – rather than a threat *to* – white racial privilege.

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[386] (Wald, op.cit.: 153).
[387] (Conley, op.cit.: 30).
[388] David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991): 125.
[389] (Moore, op.cit: 186-9).
[390] Sharon Willis, *High Contrast: Race and Gender in Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 1997): 210.
[391] Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelry and the American Working Class* (New York: Open University Publishing, 1993): 23.
[392] William Solomon, "Secret Intergrations: Black Humour and the Critique of Whiteness," *Modern Fiction Studies* 49, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 469.
[393] Homi K. Bhabba, *The Location of Culture* (London, New York: Routledge, 1994): 67.

Arguably the most significant supporter of this opinion is the black feminist bell hooks, whose work is intimately tied to whiteness theory's beginnings.[394] In her seminal *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (1992), hooks sets out her views on white claims to crisis very early on; she states: "[i]mplicit in the assumption that even those who are privileged via racist hierarchy suffer is the notion that it is only when those in power get in touch with how they too are victimized they will rebel against structures of domination." She continues: "[t]he truth is that many folks benefit greatly from dominating others and are not suffering a wound that is in any way similar to the condition of the exploited and oppressed."[395] In other words, hooks takes issue with the very idea that white people could be suggested to suffer the same kinds of social injustices as non-whites, and thus the notion that cross-racial mimesis could be taken to signify the claim to a white/non-white affinity on those grounds, is by the same token, rendered untenable.[396] For hooks, cross-racial mimesis would equate to nothing other than an *appropriation* of the culture of the Other; she refers to the "commodification" of blackness, black culture, and Otherness, to "[e]ating the Other."[397] Moreover, far from undermining white racial privilege, she argues that such appropriation actually undermines that which it appropriates, in the sense that it divorces it from its original context, and in so doing, strips it of any political intent; as she states: "when commodified it is easy to ignore political messages."[398] In a line of argument that is highly relevant to the hip-hop junkie scene in *Human Traffic*, hooks cites rap music as representing a particular example of this, noting that although "a product like rap articulates narratives of coming to critical political consciousness," that message is likely to be lost on white appropriative audiences.[399] In fact, she actually sees rap – and the white male's enthusiasm for it – as constituting a serious threat to blackness, since its violent, phallocentric, and misogynistic focus, not only reinforces inherently negative stereotypes of black masculinity, it also sends out the message to black men that they will be rewarded for living up to those stereotypes.[400] One point that hooks fails to

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[394] As I have mentioned previously, non-white feminists (including hooks) were among the first to call for whiteness to be studied 'qua whiteness.'
[395] bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (London: Turnaround, 1992): 13.
[396] Such an affinity is of course that which is entailed in my earlier suggestion that underprivileged, or simply dispossessed, white males may turn to cross-racial mimesis precisely because blackness is what Roediger called a 'political colour of the oppressed.'
[397] (hooks, ibid.: 7, 14, 21; and chapter two 'Eating the Other: Desire and Resistence: 21-40, respectively).
[398] (hooks, ibid.: 34).
[399] (hooks, ibid.: 34).
[400] (paraphrased, hooks, ibid.: 109).

acknowledge, however, is that as well as being violent and misogynistic, the lyrics of rap and hip-hop music are also frequently *anti-white*, and thus the popularity of these musical genres within white, and especially white male circles – symptomatic of appropriation or no – must at the very least be considered problematic for the notion of white racial privilege.[401] hooks' references to the *motives* behind the 'eating of the Other' compound this assertion, since whether or not these are driven by white racial privilege, they are nevertheless hardly suggestive of positive white self-perceptions. She states: "[t]he commodification of Otherness has been so successful because it is offered as a new delight, more intense, more satisfying than normal ways of doing and feeling. Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture."[402] Such is the logic of the explicit cross-racial mimetic.

We have seen so far then, that on-screen manifestations of explicit cross-racial mimesis can involve racial indeterminacy, socioeconomic affiliations, and the devaluation of white consumer culture; mimetic addiction, white masculine crisis, and the corresponding attraction of the black male's existence; and finally, an uncertain relationship between appropriative tendencies, and negative white self-perceptions. In the final instance of explicit cross-racial mimesis that I would like to discuss – Mark Mylod's film *Ali G Indahouse* (2002) – each of these issues is to some extent brought to bear.[403] In an even bigger progression than that between *Shopping* and *Human Traffic*, the explicit cross-racial mimetic is in this film advanced from a minor character, to a protagonist: giving all the more reason to believe this figure to be of increasing significance to contemporary British society. The eponymous character (Sacha Baron Cohen) is in many ways the ultimate inscription of this identity, since much of the film's comedic effect is derived precisely from the fact that he does not simply believe himself to be 'in tune' with blackness, he actually believes himself to *be* black. Ali carries this belief through into every aspect of his life, from his mode of dress (which is a grossly exaggerated imitation of the afore-mentioned 'gangsta pose:' Fig. 7, overleaf) to his philosophy (embodied in his trademark phrase "keepin' it real"). The character is

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[401] David Roediger has commented on this issue: "Hiphop offers white youth not only the spontaneity, experimentation, humor, danger, sexuality, physical movement and rebellion absent for what passes as white culture but it also offers an explicit, often harsh, critique of whiteness." (Roediger (1994) op.cit.: 16).

[402] (hooks, op.cit.: 21).

[403] *Ali G Indahouse* (Mark Mylod, Filmfour/Kalima Productions GmbH & co. KG/Studio Canal/Talkback Productions/WT2 Productions/Working Title Films, UK/France/Germany, 2002).

an obvious play upon the audience's prior awareness of figures such as the 'wannabe' and the 'wigger' (the Chav, remember, had not yet emerged at this time), and thus one would assume its message to be that he is not black at all, but white. As if the explicit cross-racial mimetic did not already complicate racial identity enough, however, Ali's racial identity is not even as clear as that. Following the opening scene, which depicts Ali in South Central Los Angeles as the ultimate embodiment of white male fantasies of hyper-masculine (and super-endowed) blackness, the spectator is catapulted from Ali's dream existence, to his real-life existence, in which his Nan, whom we soon encounter, is conspicuously white. This is complicated further by the fact that as Nicola Rehling has noted, Ali G was already a well-known Television character before the film was released, and that in the programmes, he makes "comments about his Uncle Jamal, who owns a local curry house," which, along with his "Asian-sounding first name" suggests that he is not white, but Asian.[404] Moreover, Baron Cohen himself is actually Jewish: an identity grouping that like the Irish, has historically walked a changing line in terms of its relation to, and inclusion within, the category 'whiteness.' As a figure of racial indeterminacy then, Ali G is an example that could hardly be bettered.

Fig. 7

Nevertheless, the principle racial relationship in the film – in terms of the differing experiences of masculine experience – is between blackness and whiteness. To reiterate, Ali's mimesis of blackness (whether in a literal, or introspective, sense)

[404] Nicola Rehling, "All and Nothing: White Heterosexual Masculinity in Contemporary British Cinema" (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece, 2006): 293. Accessed 03/07/06. URL: > http://cds.lib.auth.gr/submit/archive/Griza/gri-2006-725.pdf <.

never ceases in the film, and thus it is difficult to know exactly when he is representing whiteness on its own. However, in those instances where Ali is shown not to match up to his self-image of hyper-potent masculinity, one can assume it to mean that it is his 'whiteness' that is to blame. Two images in particular leave a lasting impression in this respect, since they cut right to the heart of the white male's fears of inadequacy in relation to the black male: in other words, they involve penile size. The first of these images is encountered in the afore-mentioned dream sequence, and thus is symbolic of Ali's fantasised self-image of blackness. In a gesture towards chivalry, Ali steps in to rescue a couple of "bitches" from the unwelcome advances of a typified Hispanic gangsta figure, which consequently results in a running gun battle between himself and the numerous (equally typified) members of his gang. Ali proves himself to be invincible, dodging and deflecting bullets, dispatching his enemies (not to mention innocent passers-by) with ease. However, a shot grazes his trouser leg at knee height, at which point several inches of his enormous member drop through the resulting hole (Fig. 8, overleaf). His self-image (embodied in this shot) is thus established as one of an almost super-human black masculine potency. The second image, this one relating to Ali's actual degree of masculine potency, occurs during the cold hard light of day, and as a result is similarly revealing. Having chained himself to the railings outside his local council office in a political protest, Ali falls foul of his rival gang and is humiliatingly left with his trousers and his pants around his ankles. A pretty girl steps off a bus and walks towards him, at which point Ali – obviously anxious about not measuring up to his assumed image – frantically begins to think arousing thoughts, with the aim of "get[ting] a semi lob on." Clearly, however, this fails to have sufficient effect: when the girl notices him, and his supposedly 'enormous' member, she simply emits a disdainful giggle, and walks off. Little wonder then, that Ali turns to the 'spice' that is black masculinity, as a means for making good white masculinity's failings.

Ultimately, as has been the case (in varying degrees) with each of the described instances of explicit cross-racial mimesis, regardless of the fact that as a strategy for the white male's re-empowerment it is represented as faintly ridiculous, contemporary British cinematic representations of explicit cross-racial mimesis have reinforced racist notions about the relative merits of white, and black, male subjectivity, but have through that gesture helped to destabilise the notion of white racial privilege.

4.3) Colouring in the Blank Canvas of Whiteness: Implicit Cross-Racial Mimesis in *About a Boy*

> "Nobody has, even, ever *wanted* to be white."
> — Thomas DiPiero, 'White Men Aren't.'[405]

The points and arguments put forward in the previous section have, I hope, helped to explain what is going on when the white male takes Lou Reed's lead and says 'I wanna be Other.' However, those same arguments have one basic failing in terms of their helping us understand how whiteness impacts upon the lived experiences of white men in the UK as a whole. Their focus on explicit cross-racial mimesis automatically

Fig. 8

precludes the experiences of those white men who see *uses* for Black/Other culture, yet do not see that as a reason to actually want to *be* black or Other. These white men are engaged in a process of cross-racial mimesis (in the sense that they value black/Other culture for what its use can bring to them), but it is of a quite different kind to that discussed so far. This is where *implicit* cross-racial mimesis – and Paul and Chris Weiz' film *About a Boy* (2002) – step into the frame.[406]

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[405] Thomas DiPiero, "White Men Aren't," *Camera Obscura*, no. 30 (1993): 113.
[406] *About a Boy* (Chris and Paul Weitz, Kalima Productions/Studio Canal/Tribeca Productions/Working Title Films, UK/US/France/Germany, 2002).

The Weitz brothers' film, a eulogy to the white nuclear family, manifests all the effects of this strategy, and even places it at the centre of its diegetic logic. Adapted from the Nick Hornby novel of the same title, the narrative's events centre on the lives of Marcus (Nichols Hoult), a troubled young boy whose mother is emotionally unstable, and Will (Hugh Grant), a self-indulgent 38 year old single male who has the unusual 'privilege' of being able to say he does "nothing."[407] A chance event brings these characters into each other's lives (Will invents a fictitious son in order to meet single women, one of whom is a friend of Marcus' mother), and they both end up being the means by which the other is able to resolve their problems.[408]

In terms of its overall look, *About a Boy* reduces its wider context to a series of images and things. The diegetic significance of this device is made clear from the very opening sequence. Like many films, sound precedes the image in *About a Boy*, which imparts the subsequently delayed image with that bit more importance when it finally does materialise on the screen. The distinctive music of the popular television quiz show *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* is the first thing heard, closely followed by the host Chris Tarant's voice asking: "Who wrote the phrase: 'no man is an island?'"[409] The screen immediately fills with a shot looking down on a man – Will – walking from above; he passes from the bottom to the top of the screen, and the image then cuts to a waist-height shot as he continues past the widescreen TV playing the afore-mentioned show. It cuts again to a same height shot of a large, ultra-modern sofa and coffee-table arrangement, behind which we can just glimpse an equally large, equally modern loft apartment. We see him reach for the remote control and the sound from the TV dies, immediately replaced by non-diegetic music, and a voice over in which Will ruminates on the above question, and in the process outlines his opinion on the situation and makeup of the modern – and implicitly white – male. His commentary is extremely revealing, and worth citing in its entirety.[410]

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[407] Nick Hornby, *About a Boy* (London: Penguin, 1998).
[408] There is, in other words, an explicit mimesis in the film as well as the implicit (i.e. Will's miming of the white father figure), showing that the mimetic exchange can function in ways other than across races.
[409] *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* (ITV (Channel Three), Celador Productions, UK, 1998-present) (episode unknown). Incidentally, the answer to the question is that the metaphysical poet John Donne wrote the phrase, in his work Meditation XVII (from imdb.com; URL: > http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0276751/trivia < accessed 12/03/06).
[410] Given that the film is, as I have said, an adaptation of a novel, I would argue that dialogue plays a bigger part in this film than it might otherwise do. For this reason, and the fact that the voiceover commentaries of both protagonists continue throughout the film by marking specific significant events, I will therefore pay more attention to aspects of dialogue, and as a consequence, will include more direct citations from dialogue in this analysis than I have previously.

> "I like to think all men are islands; and what's more, now's the time to be one: this is an island age. A hundred years ago for instance, you had to depend on other people. No-one had TV, or CD's, or DVD's, or videos, or home espresso-makers. As a matter of fact they didn't have anything cool. Whereas now, you see, you can make yourself a little island paradise. With the right supplies, and more importantly, the right attitude, you can be sun-drenched; tropical; a magnet for young Swedish tourists. And I like to think, perhaps, I'm that kind of island. I like to think I'm pretty cool. I like to think…I'm Ibiza."

Whilst these ruminations unfold, the image itself carries on in the same vein as above, following Will as he passes through a series of open-plan spaces in the process of readying himself to go out, cutting from one indistinct shot to another, never showing

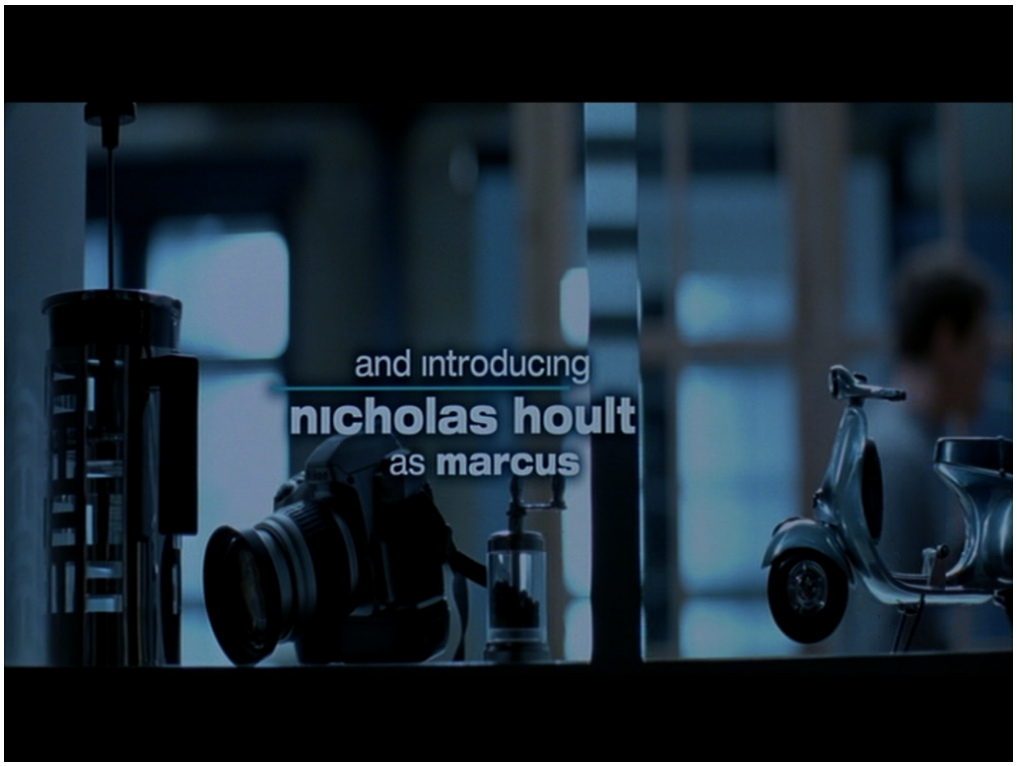

Fig. 8

Will directly, but focusing instead on his *things*, and his space (Fig. 8, above). We see that Will does possess the TV, the CD's, the DVD's, and the home espresso-maker, and many other supposedly 'cool' items besides, each of which is divested of its use value and functions merely as sign, both at the behest of the camera, and Will himself.[411] In short, these things are Will's 'right supplies:' possessions by which he defines himself, yet also signs that (he hopes) grant him entry to that utopian state of maleness about which he fantasises – true independence from others.

[411] In one shot, for instance, we see a gleaming stainless steel microwave being used only to make a hot drink: implying that Will does not even use the majority of these items, and only possesses them because they are 'cool'.

This sequence leaves the audience with little doubt as to Will's attitudes about himself and the world around him. He places value on 'cool' things and not other people (we see him crumple a note bearing the name Kristina – symbolising the arena of interpersonal relationships – and toss it in a waiting rubbish bin at one point), and he believes his own self-worth to be bound up, or reflected, in the 'cool' things with which he surrounds himself (this is symbolised explicitly in several of the shots since he is quite literally reflected *in* his possessions (see Fig. 9, overleaf). More importantly, however, the sequence provides a reason to suspect that Will may perceive blackness, or rather, black culture, in this same light (i.e. as just another sign in relation to which he can define himself, just another 'cool' thing like those others in his list), since these

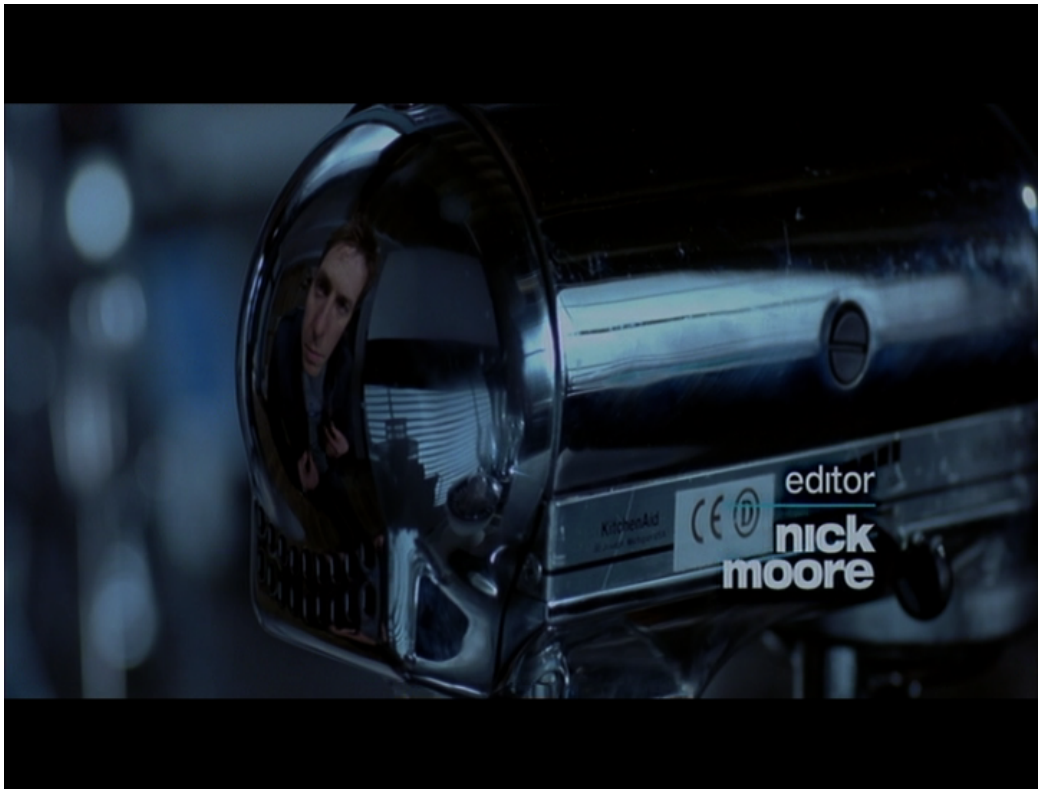

Fig. 9

things have, as Mercer suggested, long held the 'mark of cool.' Moreover, one does not have to wait long for this suspicion to be confirmed, since Will's (and indeed the film's) views on race soon become clear once his life becomes intertwined with that of Marcus.

Comparing Marcus' introductory scene with Will's, it is clear from the very beginning that the two characters are dissimilar in more ways than just their respective ages. A wipe cut marks the intersection of the two scenes, as Will's distorted reflection is replaced by Marcus' comparatively clear form, shot from above, sliding in from the right of the screen. The image cuts to a medium close-up of Marcus' pet hamster in his wheel (virtually Marcus' *only* possession, and certainly not something he defines

himself by), but almost immediately the camera refocuses to show Marcus himself in the room behind, in bed, though clearly unable to sleep.[412] A sequence of shots then follows, and unlike Will, Marcus is clearly visible throughout. Overplaying the whole is another voiceover commentary, in which Marcus recounts the source of his worry:

> "There were people out there who had a good time in life. I was beginning to realise: I wasn't one of them. I just didn't fit. I didn't fit at my old school, and I definitely didn't fit at my new one. I heard that some kids got taught by their parents at home. Mum couldn't do that – unless I payed her to teach me – because it was just her and me, and she went to work. (…) Basically, I had to go to school."

Marcus's deeply unhappy life situation contrasts strongly with Will's: he of course *is* one of those 'good time' people (or at least, that is the role he has chosen for himself), whereas Marcus, by his own admission, is not. The reason Marcus gives for this is that he doesn't 'fit': revealing that although he humours his militantly individual mother and promises not to be a 'sheep' (i.e. conform to the group ideal), all he really wants to do is negotiate a place in the pre-arranged structure of social meaning. The implication, therefore, is that Will's approach to life may provide the answer to Marcus' problems. What is more, there is some suggestion that this exchange may work both ways, since another of Marcus' voiceover commentaries (heard after his mother has attempted suicide) reveals that he has a far more advanced, not to mention mature, understanding of the need to rely on others than Will: "Two people isn't enough" he reflects, "You need a backup. If there are just two people and someone drops off the edge, then you're on your own. Two isn't a large enough number. You need three at least." Marcus understands that sometimes there is a great need to rely on others, and it is in this respect that he holds the key to *Will's* problems: even though at the beginning of the film Will is too self-deluded to realise that his life is in fact – as one of his friends suggests – "a complete disaster." Thus each is poised to be the other's saviour.

Once the two become friends (of a sort: a result of Marcus turning up at Will's flat in order to escape from bullies), Will, out of a sense of responsibility, feels compelled to offer Marcus some advice on social integration: "try to be invisible" he suggests. When Marcus dismisses this as impossible, Will determines to help Marcus in

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[412] Interestingly, this shot of Marcus' pet hamster mirrors the second shot in Will's introductory sequence, in which Will is viewed through his stylish fish tank (the only difference being that in Will's case, the camera remains focused on the foreground. This could be read to mean that each character—represented in this case by their respective pets—lives in a similar state of imprisonment. Will's cage (his inability to connect with others) may be a more stylish version than Marcus' (his mother's inability to cope, and his resultant status as a 'nerd'), but it is a cage nonetheless.

the only way he knows: he sets about equipping Marcus with the first of his own set of 'right supplies' – a pair of expensive trendy trainers – the aim being, to make Marcus "blend in with the crowd." Will's gesture backfires, however (the 'cool' trainers are stolen), underlining Will's ineffectiveness in the role of father figure that he had formally occupied quite convincingly in the realm of fantasy. Nevertheless, he perseveres, and his next gift – a portable CD player, or more precisely, the accompanying CD by the gangsta rap artist Mystikal – proves to be a lot more successful than the first.[413] Heard singing along to the track 'Shake ya Ass' by Ellie, the punk-styled tomboy leader of his school's gang of rebel rap enthusiasts, Marcus is accepted into their world, albeit that he is still considered by them as something of an oddity.[414] In effect, therefore, simply by consuming, or being seen/heard to consume, a product of fashionable black culture, Marcus gains entry into a brave new world of coolness, friends, and even a potential girlfriend. More importantly, however, he expands his support network from being just him and his mum (and subsequently, Will) with a group of people to whom he can turn in times of crisis. In short, it is as if this product of black culture is offered up as some kind of 'miracle fix' for the problem of social disenfranchisement: a problem that the crisis-ridden white male is alleged to share in common.

However, is the 'blackness' of gangsta rap really significant here? Couldn't the place of the cool cultural article have been taken by *any* genre of popular music, or even any form of fashionable popular culture, whatever its cultural or racial associations? The answer, in both cases, is that not only is the *blackness* of gangsta rap significant, *gangsta rap* is significant in itself. As I have mentioned, the film is an adaptation of Nick Hornby's novel, and as with any adaptation, certain changes have been made. Such changes can never be considered wholly insignificant, purely because decisions – conscious and highly considered decisions – had to have been taken as to what *should* be changed, and what should be left as source. The film's inclusion of gangsta rap is the result of such a decision, since in the novel, Will gave Marcus a CD by the very white (very white trash, that is) rock group Nirvana, and *not* Mystikal: a figure highly

[413] Mystikal is a genuine gangsta rapper, and significantly, one whose reputation is strongly associated with criminality of the sort feared most by the white subject. In 2004 he was imprisoned on sex-related charges, and in 2005, charged with tax fraud whilst still in prison. From: CNN.com; URL: > www.cnn.com/2004/SHOWBIZ/Music/01/16/mystikal.sexchanrge.ap/index.html <, accessed, 14/01/07.
[414] 'Shake ya Ass,' (*Let's Get Ready*, Jive Records: 2000).

symbolic of violent black male criminality.[415] Given that as I have shown above, the CD has to perform several important narrative functions, I would argue that the decision to alter its form in such a drastic way (for as the realities of the racial system continually conspire to remind us, matters of race, *matter*) would hardly have been taken lightly. Moreover, it is not as if blackness as a whole is suggested to bear the 'mark of cool,' since it appears that some elements of blackness are far cooler than others. For instance, Roberta Flack's classic soul ballad 'Killing me softly' is the butt of a running joke throughout the film (Marcus and his mother perform an overly enthusiastic version for a cringing Will in one scene; he recalls: "there they were, singing with their eyes closed, killing me softly with *their* words"), and the song is the means for both Will's and Marcus' ultimate humiliation when they perform it together in the school talent show towards the end of the film.[416] Overall then, gangsta rap, and the connotations of dangerous black male bodies that it carries, has to be considered as something of a special case, and thus the functions that the CD performs in the narrative, must also be considered as bearing a direct (diegetic) link to blackness and black masculinity.

Returning to this 'enhancing' capacity of black culture then; the way in which Marcus is able to more or less reverse his social disenfranchisement, simply through making a connection with black male culture, is symptomatic of the thinking behind what I have called implicit cross-racial mimesis. As the word 'implicit' suggests, this term has a subtler range of applications than the more obvious 'explicit' kind, but essentially, the implicit cross-racial mimetic can be defined as an individual who takes on certain elements of Blackness/Otherness through a vicarious exchange with the cultural products *of* those Others, whilst still remaining fixed to his/her original subject position. In other words, it is not exactly a state of *acting* Other; nor is it exactly a state of wanting to *be* Other. Rather, it is more a matter of taking certain elements *from* Otherness, and attaching them to oneself, so that one can become, so to speak: 'greater than the sum of one's natural parts.' As the opening scene indicated, this is an approach

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[415] As was pointed out in the previous chapter, Nirvana were strongly associated with the disenfranchised socioeconomic group known in the US as 'white trash,' and were also noted for being a symbol for abject white masculinity. What is more, the whiteness of white trash cannot be ignored, since as Annalee Newitz and Matthew Wray commented: the group is "marked white at the outset." See: Annalee Newitz and Matt Wray, eds., *White Trash: Race and Class in America* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997).

[416] Roberta Flack, 'Killing me Softly,' *Killing me Softly*, Atlantic/Wea, 1973. It is perhaps significant that Roberta Flack's version of the song was chosen as this model of un-cool blackness and not that of the RnB Trio, the Fugees, since the release of their album *The Score: Refugee Camp*, which featured 'Killing me Softly' as a single, had sent the song to the top of the British music charts several weeks running only a few years prior to *About a* Boy's release, and thus it was presumably thought that their version would still function as an all too effective symbol of coolness for this to be believable.

to life that Will is more than familiar with, and thus it is hardly surprising that it should have been his first thought for helping the unhappy, and in social terms, 'incomplete' Marcus. Indeed, Will is no less a mimetic than Marcus, as is signified by his reference to Mystikal being "cool" when he first gives Marcus the CD (for as the opening scene *also* indicated, Will makes it his life's business to define himself in relation to cool things). Thinking back to our earlier discussion of Gayle Wald's work on the transformative personas of white rock stars, I am reminded here of the case of Janis Joplin, who once stated to an interviewer that she adopted her stage persona Pearl (based on the classic blues-woman, Bessie Smith) because "being black for a while made [her] a better white."[417] Similarly, Jane Gaines (in reference to Michael Taussig's work) has said the following on the subject of mimesis as enhancement:

> "The awesome potency of the mimetic effect is based on a relationship between that which is represented and its representation in which the effigy or 'copy' comes to have the same powers of the original, and, in addition, power over the original….The copy, may, in fact, be seen as more powerful than what it represents (its referent) because it derives its power from it without exactly being it."[418]

Put simply: the white male engages in the process of implicit cross-racial mimesis in the hope that he will gain the same powers as the black male possesses, and also, *power over* the black male (or at least, the black male as he envisages him). Needless to say, this is an entirely *subjective* process, and one in which the black male himself need really take no part, other than as a figure in the white (male) imaginary onto which associations can be attached. What we are dealing with here then, are the white male's *perceptions* of black masculinity: and as Mercer has suggested, such perceptions will always tell us far more about the "fears and fantasies" of white men than they do about black men's real lived experiences.[419]

So what does *About a Boy* tell us about the white male, other than that he has a tendency towards cross-racial mimesis? I would suggest a great deal. It is Will that is the most significant character in this respect, since his life, indeed, his entire being, is symbolic of what Roediger has called the "empty culture of whiteness." For instance,

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[417] James Ledbetter, "Imitations of Life," *Vibe* 1, no. 1 (September 1993). Qtd. in: Gayle Wald, *Crossing the Line: Racial Passing in Twentieth-Century U.S Literature and Culture* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2000): 14.
[418] Jane Gaines, "Films That Make You Want to Fight Back (and Why White People Fear Them)," (Unpublished at time of writing: 1994). (Qtd. in Gormley, op.cit.: 86).
[419] Paraphrase (Mercer, op.cit.: 149).

not only does Will do "nothing" (in terms of employment, that is), the means by which he is able to do so belongs to that precise category of crass, valueless, consumer white culture that Roediger's statement evokes.[420] One scene in particular is especially significant in this respect. Having already discovered the enormous cultural capital that is gained through occupying the position of the white father figure through the earlier fictitious son debacle, Will allows the beautiful Rachel (with whom he is instantly besotted) to believe that Marcus is his actual son. Unlike the earlier incident, however, this move is presented in the film as an act of desperation; Will comments on their meeting:

> "[s]he was interesting, smart and attractive, and for about 5 minutes I had her convinced I was too (…) it was torture: for 5 minutes I realised what life would be like if I were in any way interesting; if I had anything to say for myself; if I *did* anything. But I didn't *do* anything. And in about 30 seconds, she would know, and she'd be off like a shot (…) I acted in self defence."

When, in a later scene, Rachel finally finds out the truth, there is a reference back to this commentary, in which Rachel remarks: You know the first time I met you, I thought you were a bit blank. Then you changed my mind. But maybe I was right." Desolate, Will simply replies: "I'm sorry, you're right. I am… a blank. I'm nothing." This association of Will (and by extension, the white masculinity of which he is representative) with nothingness, or blankness, is in fact present in several other scenes also. For instance, at the beginning of the film, Will is asked to be a godparent to a friend's baby; when he declines on the grounds that he would be a terrible choice for such a role of responsibility, his friend remarks: "we just thought you had hidden depths Will," to which he replies: "no, no no, you've always had that wrong. I really am this shallow." The comment is obviously intended as a joke, but it is revealing of Will's suggested self-perception nevertheless. Similarly, in a later scene, as Will wallows in self-pity over his loss of Rachel, he again baulks at responsibility when Marcus comes to him for help and support regarding his mother's lapse back into depression. Taking his frustrations out on the desperate Marcus, Will exasperatedly snaps: "I'm nobody (…) this isn't my problem, I'm not your family mate, I'm *not*. (…) I'll tell you what I am. I'm the guy who's *really good* at choosing trainers or records, OK? That's it. I can't help you with real things; I can't help you with anything that means anything."

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[420] In an early scene, Will explains that he lives off the royalties of a Christmas song entitled 'Santa's Super Sleigh,' since it was written by his father in 1956.

Such comments suggest that this notion of white masculinity as being somehow blank or empty is deep-seated, and that even what Gaines called the 'awesome potency' of the mimetic effect is incapable of providing the white male with an enhanced substance in any meaningful sense.

The work of the US feminist and whiteness theorist Ruth Frankenberg is particularly relevant here, and offers a note on which we might draw to a close. Frankenberg's influential study *White Women, Race Matters: The social Construction of Whiteness* (1993), forged a path in understandings of white women's racial experiences, and provided new ways for thinking about whiteness as a whole that went beyond the 'always-already-privileged' assumption.[421] Her interviews with American white women on "questions of culture and belonging" revealed that whiteness was often felt by the women to be a more or less *under-privileged* condition, not so much as a result of any direct racial oppression, but more as a result of their perceiving whiteness as "an apparently empty cultural space."[422] Frankenberg explains that when asked such questions, many of the women replied that they ""did not have a culture.""[423] She cites several women's responses in detail, and these make enlightening reading; one woman comments: "in the sixties, when people *did* say "I'm proud to be black," "I'm proud to be Hispanic (…) and it became very popular to be proud of your ethnicity. And even feminists, you know, you could say, "I'm a woman," and be proud of it. But there's still a majority of the country that can't say they are proud of anything."[424] Inasmuch as this response frames the 'lack' in whiteness in relation to minority peoples and identity politics, there is some cause to believe that white racial guilt, and not whiteness itself, may be the prohibiting factor in this case. Nevertheless, as Frankenberg notes, there is a definite sense in many of the women's comments that there is something deeply unsatisfying, incomplete even, about the lived experience of white racial identity. As one interviewee comments:

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[421] Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (London, New York: Routledge, 1993).
[422] (Frankenberg, ibid.: 192).
[423] (Frankenberg, ibid.: 192). Interestingly, Brigit Brander Rasmussen, Irene Nixon, and Matt Wray, have together voiced objections to such conceptions of whiteness, because they entail a certain 'blindness' to the realities of the racial system. They point out: "the idea that whites have no culture suggests that the power of whiteness is in no way cultural." Brigit Brander Rasmussen, Eric Klineberg, Irene J. Nixon, Matt Wray, ed., *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2001): 11. Gwendolyn Audrey Foster has referred such an attitude also, having noted it among her students. She states: "Confronted with the idea of white privilege, "white" students sometimes respond with jealousy: "I don't really have a culture."" See:Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, *Performing Whiteness: Postmodern Re/Constructions in the Cinema* (Albany, NY: State U of New York P, 2003): 5.
[424] (Frankenberg, ibid.: 195).

> "If I had a fixed regional identity that was something palpable (…) if I had an ethnic base to identify from, if I was even Irish American: that would be something formed; if I was a working class woman: that would be something formed. But to be a Heinz 57 American, a white, class-confused American, land of the Kleenex type American, is so formless in and of itself. It only takes shape in relation to other people."[425]

This remarkable statement gives a glimpse into the motivating factors behind cross-racial mimesis: both of the explicit, and implicit, variety. It, and the other women's comments reveal that in the US context at least, whiteness and white culture are perceived in a certain way, and that this perception is less reflective of racial privilege than one might expect. Such comments reveal that whiteness and white culture are identified as "bland," and that white people are associated with white products (such as "white bread"), which also have connotations of blandness. They reveal that as Frankenberg notes, whiteness is paradoxically seen both as a "color (though an unappealing one) and (…) an absence of color." They reveal that whiteness and white culture are associated with brand names such as "Kleenex" and "Heinz," and by extension, with crass consumer culture. And they reveal that whiteness and white culture are therefore perceived to have been "tainted by capitalism," whereas nonwhite cultures are not.[426] Couple this with the specific conditions of white masculine crisis, and the fact that as Gayle Wald has explained, the ""translation" of black masculine styles into an oppositional practice for white youth has also enhanced their ability to attain (…) successful masculinity," it is hardly surprising that strategies of cross-racial mimesis have become more and more common among young white men in the UK today.

In conclusion; the various individual manifestations of cross-racial mimesis referred to in this chapter have brought their own list of revelations. The Chav revealed that cross-racial mimesis has the potential to disrupt the racial status quo, and that the most rigorous attempts will be made to maintain it if that is so. Monkey's literal blackface and *Shopping*'s racial symbolism revealed that racial meaning can be lifted free of its basis in 'literal' races and caused to roam free in a system of exchange and indeterminacy. *Human Traffic* revealed that such a system of exchange is involved in the white male's consumption of black culture, that this is a system based largely on the

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[425] (Frankenberg, op.cit.: 196).
[426] Frankenberg, op.cit.: 199-200).

white male's fears surrounding black masculinity, and that the white male engages with it as much out of need as wanting. *Ali G* showed us the shape of the white male's fantasies of a hyper-potent black masculinity, and hinted at their sexualised foundation. And finally, *About a Boy* revealed the perceived 'enhancing' capacities of black masculinity, and the emptiness that lies at the heart of the white male's subjectivity. Arguably, therefore, we are now equipped to answer the question that was posed back at the beginning of this chapter; put simply: it is the realities of whiteness, and the experience of white masculine crisis, that have, together, made today's young white men want to be Other.

Conclusion

Arriving at the final stages of this thesis has brought mixed emotions. On the one hand, there is a deep sense of satisfaction at having achieved a long-held goal; on the other, regret that a project which for so many years has dominated my life is now all but ended: emotions which I am sure are both commonly felt at such moments. In my case, however, this moment also presents a difficulty. One of the problems with a long term writing project about contemporary British film, or contemporary anything for that matter, is the tendency for such things never to remain static. The whole time I have been working on this thesis, the British film industry has kept churning out films, meaning that little by little, precisely what constitutes 'contemporary' British film has moved on. At some point, therefore, one is forced to draw a line beyond which no more recent texts will be considered, a consequence of which is that by the time the project is finished, it is already to some extent out of date. I would like to take the opportunity of this conclusion to talk about some of the more recent British films in the hope of making good this weakness, at least in part. Also, I would like to touch briefly on some of the subjects which for various reasons failed to make the cut with regards to the final shape of the main discussion, before attempting to sum up what, if anything, this thesis and its associated research project has managed to achieve.

When I first began work on this thesis, I envisaged the finished article as an in-depth analysis of contemporary British cinema in its entirety. I wanted to talk about each and every one of the most important films, about the events that surrounded them, the actors who starred in them, and the reception they received both here and around the

world. Most of all, I wanted to talk about contemporary British cinema's fascination with masculine crisis. Very soon into the research process, however, I began to realise that an even more interesting series of questions – more to do with race than gender – lay at the very heart of these matters. Gradually, the initially wide ranging scope of the thesis reduced as I became more and more interested in exploring the effects of whiteness in cinematic representations of masculine crisis. Hopefully, the result of this change is a far more original and focused thesis, yet it is also a thesis that is quite different from that which I had originally planned. At times, I have had to make difficult decisions about what to include and what to leave out, some of the most difficult of which have concerned the film texts themselves. Let me assure you, choosing *not* to write about a film such as *Trainspotting* in a study of contemporary British cinema was not a decision that was taken lightly, and I will be the first to admit that any definitive guide to this subject would have to include at least some discussion of said text, as well as several others that are also missing from these pages.[427] However, the necessity to discuss only those texts that most clearly relate to the discussion of whiteness has made such decisions unavoidable, and I would point out that whereas *Trainspotting* has been written about extensively elsewhere, the whiteness of the troubled young men whose story it and virtually every other contemporary British film portrays has thus far escaped comment.

One of the consequences of tightening the focus of the thesis in this way has been a heightened sense of awareness of that other aspect of identity which is more or less universally present in the contemporary British cinema of white masculine crisis: heterosexuality. Just as a quick appraisal of recent British cinema is all that is needed to confirm that: a) masculine crisis is a recurrent theme; and b) the men in question are all white; so will it quickly become obvious that said men are also almost exclusively straight. So, the contemporary British cinema of white masculine crisis is really the contemporary British cinema of white *and* heterosexual masculine crisis, the grossly convoluted nature of which phrase gives some indication as to why this thesis does not place the same amount of emphasis on sexuality in the discussion as it does on race. As it is, its focus has called for explanations of both race and gender theory (as well as, of course, film theory); to add to that theories of sexuality, as much as such an addition

[427] *Trainspotting* (Danny Boyle, Channel Four Films/Figment Films/The Noel Gay Motion Picture Company, UK, 1996).

might have proven valuable, would simply have been a step too far, hence their absence from the discussion.

Another area that is not given much emphasis in the thesis is discussion of the actors whose portrayals of white masculine crisis have for the last decade and more defined British cinema. Fortunately, however, this is easily rectified, for as the evidence of the previous chapters gives some hint to, those individuals represent a fairly select bunch. Whilst working on this thesis, I have watched a large proportion of recent British films and am therefore more qualified than most to make generalised statements regarding its makeup. One thing that I can quite categorically state is that in contemporary British cinema, the same faces appear time and time again, frequently in the same kinds of roles. What is more, among this group there are two or three actors who appear especially regularly. I cannot say for certain whether between them, Robert Carlyle, Ewan McGregor and Hugh Grant have featured in more films than all of the others put together, but what is certain is that every single one of the most important British films of the period has featured at least one or the other of them.[428] But why these three specifically? Is there something about them as actors or as men that makes them particularly suited to the task of portraying the disenfranchised and crisis-ridden white male? The answer, in each case, is likely to be different.

In McGregor's case, his good looks are obviously part of the reason for his success, yet he has also proven himself over the years to be an extremely capable and more importantly versatile actor, as is proven by the fact that he has been able to transfer his talents outside the context of British cinema on the occasion of his now numerous appearances for Hollywood. This point about versatility is also true to a certain extent of Carlyle, since although his success in being cast in British films seems largely a result of his ability to portray the 'working class everyman' type, when taking into account both his film and television work he has actually played quite a wide range of characters: everything from a notorious dictator who tries to conquer the world in the TV miniseries *Hitler: The Rise of Evil* (2003), to a brilliant marine biologist who tries to save it in the apocalyptic British film *Flood* (2007).[429] Grant's story on the other hand is altogether more complicated. Of the three, it is he who comes closest to

[428] In the aforementioned *Trainspotting*'s case two of the three featured: Ewan McGregor as Renton and Robert Carlyle as Begby.
[429] *Hitler: The Rise of Evil* (Christian Duguay, Alliance Atlantis Communications, Canada/USA, 2003). *Flood* (Tony Mitchell, Power/A Muse Productions/Moonlighting Films/Flood Productions/Muse Entertainment Enterprises, UK/South Africa/Canada, 2007).

embodying the figure of white masculine crisis, which of course explains why he has featured more prominently in the previous pages than any other actor. A performer with remarkable comic talents, Grant's success, like McGregor's, has also extended to numerous Hollywood roles (at the time of writing he is soon to appear alongside Sarah Jessica Parker in *Did You Hear About the Morgans?* Directed by Marc Lawrence), whilst his ability to portray the crisis-ridden white male has no doubt been enhanced by his real life involvement in several very public break-ups and one unfortunate episode in 1995 when he was arrested by Los Angeles police after being discovered in his car with a prostitute.[430]

Yet for all Grant's suitability as the affable yet emotionally troubled romantic lead, there is a side to his star persona that is rather more complex than such performances suggest. In fact, it has been suggested to me that his persona "is in many ways a reclamation – a re-heterosexualisation – of the dandy or the fop": an opinion with which I am in wholehearted agreement.[431] Grant's performance in the 1987 film *Maurice*, directed by James Ivory and based on the novel by E.M. Forster of the same name, is particularly relevant here.[432] In the film, Grant plays Cambridge student Clive Durham, friend and eventual lover of fellow student Maurice Hall (played by James Wilby), whom he subsequently leaves in order to marry, thereby regaining his place in society. The film, like the novel, makes the argument that if there is anything disgusting or shameful about homosexual love, it is society's insistence that what is an essential part of the human condition is fundamentally wrong that is disgusting, not the other way around. Viewed in light of this performance, Grant's later ones seem to make more sense, since he is always struggling against something – very often his own feelings – and whilst he has reclaimed the ground of heterosexuality, there is always something slightly effeminate, slightly less than masculine about the characters that he plays. Moreover, given that his upper-middle-class Englishness is one of his trademarks, and that as a result I would argue that Grant is in many ways the whitest of the aforementioned 'big three' (remember the problematic nature of working-class whiteness as discussed in chapters one and two), it is hardly surprising that I consider

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[430] *Did You Hear About the Morgans?* (Marc Lawrence, Columbia Pictures/Relativity Media/Catle Rock Entertainment/Banter Films, US, 2009).
[431] Dr. Niall Richardson, upon reading an earlier draft of this thesis.
[432] *Maurice* (James Ivory, Merchant Ivory Productions/Cinecom Pictures/Film Four International, UK, 1987). E.M. Forster. *Maurice*. London: Penguin, 1971.

him to be the single most important figure in the contemporary British cinema of white masculine crisis.

Grant's most recent performance for British cinema saw him reprising his role as womanising Daniel Cleaver in *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (2004), a film most memorable for his hilarious fight scene with Colin Farrell in the role of Bridget's boyfriend Mark Darcy.[433] (The fight is utterly pathetic – two Englishmen who are essentially scared of each other, pushing and shoving, desperately trying not to get hurt themselves – it is hard to think of a less masculine scene). The role was a rare chance for Grant to play the bad guy (an experience that he is reported to have enjoyed intensely), but offered no real departure in terms of its relation to white masculine crisis: Cleaver is still wracked with insecurities, dysfunctional in anything other than the most meaningless of personal relationships. But what about more recent British cinema? Are there any signs that the fascination with white masculine crisis is abating? The short answer is no, since the shape of contemporary British cinema over the last few years has not appeared noticeably different from how it has looked for virtually the last fifteen. In fact, perhaps the most remarkable thing about recent British cinema has been the appearance of a new film by Richard Curtis – *The Boat That Rocked* (2009) – and that for once, it *doesn't* star Hugh Grant (more on which film later).[434] There have of course been various small developments in recent years – one of the most interesting of which is the re-emergence of the comedy horror genre – but nothing that would lead me to suggest that the next few years will not see things continuing in much the same way as before.

Beginning with *Dog Soldiers* in 2002, British cinema has made a small but significant contribution to the recent renaissance in the comedy horror genre via the subsequent release of *Shaun of the Dead* in 2004, and *Lesbian Vampire Killers* in 2009.[435] Interestingly, both of the later films can trace their roots back to small screen comedy insofar as their stars because famous through hit television comedy shows.

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[433] *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (Beeban Kidron, Working Title Films/Universal Pictures/Miramax Films/Atlantic Television/Little Bird/Studio Canal, UK/France/Germany/Ireland/US, 2004).
[434] *The Boat That Rocked* (Richard Grant, Universal Pictures/Studio Canal/Working Title Films/Medienproduktion Prometheus Filmgesellschaft/Portobello Studios/Tightrope Pictures, UK/Germany/US/France, 2009).
[435] *Dog Soldiers* (Neil Marshall, Kismet Entertainment Group/The Noel Gay Picture Company/Carousel Picture Company/Luxembourg Film Fund, UK/Luxembourg/US, 2002). *Shaun of the Dead* (Edgar Wright, Studio Canal/Working Title Films/WT2 Productions/Big Talk Productions/Inside Track 2/Filmfour, UK/France, 2004). *Lesbian Vampire Killers* (Phil Claydon, Alliance Films/Momentum Pictures/Velvet Bite/AV Pictures, UK, 2009).

Shaun of the Dead, a facetious take on the classic zombie format, features Simon Pegg and Nick Frost (both of *Spaced* fame) as Shaun and Ed, two hapless mates who one day wake to discover that their entire neighbourhood has been overrun by flesh-eating zombies.[436] The plot unfolds as the pair battle for survival, and in Shaun's case, as he attempts to win back the girlfriend who has dumped him at the film's opening. *Lesbian Vampire Killers* follows a very similar structure. The film stars James Corden and Matthew Horne (both of *Gavin and Stacey* fame) as Fletch and Jimmy, two hapless mates who go on holiday to a sleepy country village, only to discover that its womenfolk have been enslaved by lesbian vampires due to an ancient curse.[437] The plot unfolds as the pair battle for survival (joined by the beautiful foreign student Lotte, played by MyAnna Buring) and in Jimmy's case, as he attempts first to win back the girlfriend who has dumped him at the film's opening, and subsequently, to win the hand of Lotte, to defeat the lesbian vampires, and to rid the village of its curse. Ultimately, both of the films are notable for the way that they translate the familiar theme and structure of white masculine crisis – an event occurs that disrupts the status quo, throwing the white male into crisis; he must subsequently take efforts to re-establish this balance and so regain his masculinity by the end of the film – within the context of nonsensical plots that have the effect of downplaying the seriousness of white masculine crisis, thereby offering a lighter hearted and more optimistic viewpoint.

Besides the comedy horror genre, the last few years have little else in the way of developments in British cinema. There have of course been several additions to the Bond franchise (the subject for a doctoral thesis in itself), *Casino Royale* in 2006 and *Quantum of Solace* in 2008, which between them have introduced both a new Bond in the shape of British actor Daniel Craig, as well as a new, more visceral spectator experience more akin to that of Hollywood's recent *Bourne* series – *The Bourne Identity* (2002), *The Bourne Supremacy* (2004), and *The Bourne Ultimatum* (2007), all starring Matt Damon – than the Bond films of old.[438] Nevertheless, the narrative structure of the

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[436] *Spaced* (Edgar Wright, ITV1, Paramount Comedy Channel/LWT, UK, 1999-2001).
[437] *Gavin and Stacey* (Christine Gernon, BBC2, Baby Cow Productions, UK, 2007-present).
[438] *Casino Royale* (Martin Campbell, MGM/Columbia Pictures/Eon Productions/Danjaq/Babelsberg Film/Casino Royale Productions/Casino Royale/Stillking Films/United Artists, UK/US/Germany/Czech Republic, 2006). *Quantum of Solace* (Marc Forster, MGM/Columbia Pictures/B22/Danjaq/Eon Productions/United Artists, UK/US/Canada, 2008). *The Bourne Identity* (Doug Liman, Universal Pictures/Kennedy-Marshal Company/Hypnotic/Kalima Productions GmbH & Co. KG/Stillking Films, US/Germany/Czech Republic, 2002). *The Bourne Supremacy* (Paul Greengrass, Universal Pictures/Motion Picture THETA Produktiongesellschaft/Kennedy-Marshall Company/Ludlum Entertainment/Hypnotic, US/Germany, 2004). *The Bourne Ultimatum* (Paul Greengrass, Universal

films is essentially the same since it continues the recent trend of moving towards a more troubled Bond, one who is effective as a killer, but whose wildness and emotionally damaged nature mean that he is ineffective both as an agent and as a human being. In short, Bond is still a figure of white masculine crisis. The Harry Potter Franchise has also seen several new additions, first with *The Goblet of Fire* in 2005, followed by *The Order of the Phoenix* in 2007, and most recently, *The Half Blood Prince* in 2009, although much as in Bond's case, the films have shown a progressively darker, more troubled side to Harry's character, whilst his various ordeals and his ongoing struggle with his arch nemesis Voldemort are easy to interpret within the familiar sequence of events of white masculine crisis.[439]

The last film that I would like to discuss is the aforementioned *The Boat That Rocked*, the story of a pirate radio ship and its mission to preach the 'word of Rock' in a repressed 1960's Britain. The film events are seen through the eyes of Carl (Tom Sturrbridge), whose mother has sent him to stay with Quentin (Bill Nighy) – his Godfather and the ship's captain – in the rather bizarre hope that the experience might in some way help to set him back on the straight and narrow after his having been expelled from school. As soon as Carl arrives, however, he realises that his mother's plan is, as Quentin suggests, a "colossal mistake," since events on board are a heady round of parties, drug-taking and sex, accompanied all the while by the soundtrack of Rock and pop music which is the station's solitary output, transmitted 24 hours a day to an adoring legion of fans. The narrative unfolds as the hard-line Conservative government of the day, represented by the chronically uptight Dormandy (Kenneth Branagh) and aided by his subordinate Twatt (Jack Davenport), attempt to find a way to force the station off the air: an outcome which they believe would represent a victory both for the law and for morality. Carl, meanwhile, is being corrupted at the hands of the irreverent Dave (Nick Frost again), one of the station's DJs, whilst two of its other DJs, The Count and Gavin Canavagh (Phillip Seymour Hoffmann and Rhys Ifans, respectively) engage in an intense personal rivalry to become undisputed king of the airwaves. Events continue in this vein as the station survives various schemes intended to bring about its downfall, until eventually, Dormandy finds a reason to pass a law

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Pictures/Motion Picture BETA Produktiongesellschaft/Kennedy-Marshall Company/Ludlum Entertainment/Bourne Again/Angel Studios, US/Germany, 2007).

[439] *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (Mike Newell, Warner Bros. Pictures/Heyday Films/Patalex IV Productions Limted, UK/USA, 2005). *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (David Yates, Warner Bros. Pictures/Heyday Films/Cool Music/Harry Potter Publishing Rights, UK/US, 2007). *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince* (David Yates, warner Bros. Pictures, Heyday Films, UK/US, 2009).

which makes the ship illegal, and its crew and all of it listeners criminals (a consequence of the station's powerful signal having blocked a distress signal at sea). Defying the ban, the station continues broadcasting (to the delight of its listeners) and sets sail in an effort to escape the government's wrath, at which point the long stationary ship suffers a catastrophic failure and begins to sink rapidly. Facing disaster, the ship's crew issues a distress call over the airwaves, only to be abandoned by the government on the orders of the embittered Dormandy (reasoning that a rescue mission would be a scandalous misuse of public funds). On the brink of drowning, the crew are eventually rescued by the arrival of a flotilla of vessels belonging to their grateful listeners, and so the film closes with the suggestion that public demand will overrule government legislation, and that others will step up to take on the mantle of broadcasting popular music to the masses, which of course, is precisely what happened.

In Many ways, the film is typical Curtis material. It features the same kinds of quirky characters, amongst whom the same kind of slight diversity applies (they are mostly white men, though one non-white man features, as do several white women, one of whom is a lesbian) and of course, the same brand of Curtis humour. Nevertheless, it is not surprising that Grant does not feature in the film, since with a narrative structure such as has just been described, it is hard to see where his talents might have been put to use; after all, his customary role – the romantic lead – simply does not exist. That is not to say, however, that the typical theme of heterosexual romance is absent from the film entirely. Despite Curtis' previously mentioned claim that he had tired of writing romantic comedies, it appears that with *The Boat That Rocked* he just couldn't help himself, since Carl's experiences in the film are framed by his romance with Quentin's niece Marianne (played by Talulah Riley). Interrupted in its early stages by Dave, who inexplicably seduces the impressionable Marianne right before she and Carl are themselves about have sex, the relationship develops throughout the film as Carl struggles to come to terms with what was happened, and culminates in their eventual reconciliation as a couple, and in Marianne rescuing him from the waves at the film's close. Carl's story is a typical coming of age tale, and is easy to interpret within the context of white masculine crisis. Ultimately, however, the biggest and most important romance in the film is not Carl's and Marianne's, it is that of the station's DJs and its listeners with the music of the 1960s itself. Although this represents a slight departure for Curtis' films from their traditional reliance on the theme of heterosexual romance, little else exists in this film, or in recent British films generally, to suggest that the

observations made in this thesis about the overall makeup of British cinema in terms of race and gender will cease to apply any time soon.

To conclude then, what is the sum of those observations? What has this thesis managed to achieve? Even if it is only that it has demonstrated and catalogued contemporary British cinema's fascination with white masculine crisis, it will have achieved something. Cinema, like all forms of popular culture, acts like a barometer for the moods and opinions of the society within which it is produced, and as such, a trend that is as wide ranging and long-lasting as this one has proven to be must pronounce a fundamental truth about that society: which is not a bad accomplishment for any piece of writing. Hopefully, however, that is not all this thesis has managed to achieve. Some of the most important film texts from a National cinema over the period of nearly twelve years have been picked apart and analysed in detail, along with many others besides. Questions have been asked and answered as to how these films operate, how they relate to each other, and what conclusions can be drawn from them, adding to the cultural repository of knowledge and bettering the understanding of contemporary British cinema as a whole. I would hope that these analyses alone deserve at least some merit. Most of all though, if this thesis has helped to highlight whiteness in any way; if it has shown the different and manifold ways in which whiteness affects life and representation; if it has demonstrated to any degree the different sides to whiteness, the different experiences of whiteness, I will consider its goals to have been reached, and myself to have succeeded. As its title suggests, this thesis has told the story of 'a cinema of *white* masculine crisis,' and that, I believe, is its biggest achievement.

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